

**ICHIEI
ISHIBUMI**

ILLUSTRATION BY
Miyama-Zero

6

High school

DOX DO

HOLY BEHIND
THE GYMNASIUM

PARENTAL ADVISORY
WARNING
EXPLICIT CONTENT





High school

DXD

6

HOLY BEHIND THE GYMNASIUM



**"Go! Durendal!
Ascalon! Help save
my friend! Answer
my caaaaall!"**

**The two blades
began to pulsate
in concert, their auras
feeding into each
other.**



"I shall
take
that
silence
for my
own,
one of
these
days."

The girl—
Ophis—
lifted her
hand into
the air,
pointing
toward
the Great
Red with
a finger
gun
gesture.

High School DxD

HOLY BEHIND THE GYMNASIUM

6

ICHIEI ISHIBUMI

ILLUSTRATION BY
MIYAMA-ZERO


New York

Copyright



Volume 6

Ichiei Ishibumi

Translation by Haydn Trowell

Cover art by Miyama-Zero

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Can I stay by your side forever, Issei?

Life.0

When I glanced around, I found myself in an elegant Japanese-style room.

Not even a single scratch marred the woven tatami mats that lined the floor. The room was filled with expensive-looking vases, and outside the window was an exquisite traditional garden fitted with a deer scarer that let out a refreshing, peaceful *clap* at regular intervals.

“Issei.”

A woman dressed in a white kimono appeared before me.

Asia?!

She knelt formally, bowing her head. This blond-haired, green-eyed foreign beauty was so pure and sacred that I could hardly contain my joy!

She looked at me with warm, moist eyes and said, “Thank you for everything you’ve done for me. I’ll be leaving to get married soon.”

Wh-whaaaaat?!

“Oh, Asia, look at you...”

“Asia! You’re so beautiful!”

At my side, my mom and dad were bawling their eyes out.

“Asia, you know you can come visit us whenever you want, right?” the prez assured as she wiped tears from her eyes.

“Asia, leave everything here to us. We’ll be fine.” Like Rias, Akeno was overflowing with emotion, too!

Huh?! Huuuuuh?! What on earth?! Asia?!

While I was paralyzed with confusion, my mom turned to me. “Issei, you

should congratulate Asia. She's always been like a little sister to you, no?"

This was all happening way too suddenly! Why was Asia getting married?!

Who was the groom?!

As if in answer, the one who had stolen my Asia's heart made his entrance.

Swoosh! A shoji door slid open, and a handsome pretty boy entered the room.

"It's a pleasure to meet you. I suppose I should address you as my brother-in-law? I'm Diodora Astaroth, an incredibly wealthy high-class demon. Heh-heh-heh, you can entrust Asia to me. I'll satisfy her—you can count on that!" With those words, he struck a handsome pose!

This was one of the high-class demons we had met the other day! He was the heir to the House of Astaroth and part of the same family as Demon King Beelzebub!

Ah, right! Now I remember!

Diodora had proposed to Asia out of nowhere at the end of summer break, right after we returned from the underworld!

"Look how gorgeous he is! I'm so relieved!"

"Yep, and he's rich, too. Maybe he'll be able to look after us in our old age, eh?"

This was unbelievable! Did my parents even know what they were saying?!

"It's such a relief to know that Asia will be with Diodora. I know she'll be happy with him."

"My thoughts exactly."

Even my Two Great Sisters, Rias and Akeno, were nodding along to it all!

Were they really okay with this?! Seriously?!

"Now then, Asia, it's time for the ceremony. Let's take the first step toward our bright new future together!" With that, Diodora took Asia in his arms, carrying her like a princess into the ceremony hall!

"Hey, you! I haven't given my blessing yet!" I called out before taking off after

them.

Seemingly unconcerned, Asia merely waved back at me. “Issei! Thank you for everything! I’m so happy now!”

Huuuuuuuuuuuh?!

Hold on! Waaaaaaiiiit!

“Asia! Your brother doesn’t approve, though!”

I tried to give chase, but I couldn’t reach her in time...

N-no... Asia...

My beautiful Asia...was about to become...someone else’s wife...



“Are you all right, Issei?”

Asia, dressed in her pajamas, was staring at me with concern.

I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes, snapping awake. Hurriedly, I glanced at the clock and saw that it was morning, right around my usual wake-up time.

“...You’re still here, Asia.”

“Of course I am. You were calling out my name in your sleep.”

Ah, so that was it. A dream. So everything about her getting married was just an awful nightmare.

I sat up in bed, a torrent of tears that I must have shed in my sleep streaking down my face.

“I dreamed that you were getting married. Ugh, it was more painful than I could have ever imagined.”

Asia flashed me a puzzled look but soon smiled back at me. “You’re such a worrywart, Issei. It’s all right. I’m not going to get married yet.”

“Really? You mean it? I’d die of loneliness, you know?”

“Yes. It would be terrible if that were to happen,” she answered with a broad smile.

Ah, my dearest Asia!

Seriously, if she *did* get married, I would be overcome with grief. Just dreaming about it had already taken a huge toll on my mental state. I was a wreck.

“...Ngh...”

—!

There was something moving under the sheets, right near my lower body!

Rising from under the blankets was...Koneko?! When did she get into my bed?!

She wiped her drowsy eyes, then wrapped her arms around my chest and promptly resumed snoozing. What was I supposed to do? Her body was so petite, so soft...

Plus, she was wearing nothing but a white shirt! Talk about foul play! It felt like her skin was pressing directly against mine...

“...Ngh... *Meow...*”

Koneko’s cat ears twitched up and down, her tail curling back and forth! Having recently learned about her true form, believe me when I say that her cuteness was practically lethal!

Hold on, if her tail’s sticking out, what about her underwear?! D-don’t tell me... N-no, this is bad! I shouldn’t think about that!

After returning home from our underworld training camp, it had been decided that Koneko would live with us going forward. I was fine with that, but it felt like she was always sneaking into my room to sit on my lap or curl up in my bed next to me...

That said, her biting tongue and willingness to lash out with a devastating punch hadn’t changed... Still, I had to wonder if she’d grown fond of me.

I was at a complete loss as to how much I should dote on Koneko. I *was* incredibly happy to discover this new side to her, though.

“Anyway, I’m glad all that about you getting married was just a bad dream, Asia.” I breathed a sigh of relief as I stroked Koneko’s head.

At that moment—

“I wish that were all that there was to it.”

The prez must have woken up before me, as she was sitting at the foot of the bed, reading a large pile of documents.

“Are those letters?” I asked.

Rias nodded. “Yes. Each and every one of them is from Diodora Astaroth. Love letters, it seems. Not to mention the movie tickets, dinner invitations, gift certificates, and all the rest. Some of the deliveries were so big that they’re still waiting out on the doorstep. I wonder how many times he’s done this now?”

Love letters?! Presents, even?! Yep, lately, these things had been arriving daily to my house, and they were all addressed to Asia.

Ngh! The sight of that gentle-looking pretty boy flared up in my mind!

That bastard! Proposing to Asia the minute we got home from the underworld!

Unsure how to respond to this attention, Asia offered her most profuse apologies with each delivery. It was clear she felt responsible for the trouble, but it wasn’t *her* fault! Asia hadn’t asked for this!

Two weeks had passed since we’d run into Diodora. Summer break was over, and the second semester at school was about to begin. Nonetheless, my anger toward that handsome bastard increased with each passing day.

I rose to my feet, my eyes glistening, and screamed at the top of my lungs, “I’ll never let him have her!”

Life.1

Say Hello to the Second Semester!

With autumn on its way, classes had started up again.

The inauguration ceremony to welcome in the new term concluded without incident, meaning that the next item on the agenda at Kuou Academy was preparing for the September Sports Festival.

Additionally, this time of year never failed to exhibit a certain phenomenon that always bugged me.

The number of my classmates who managed to come out of their shells over the vacation, reaching new levels of accomplishment and refinement, was always on the rise. In other words, they had made their so-called summer debuts.

A great many of my peers used the time off as an opportunity to embark on a bold change of image. Well, strictly speaking, the number was less than last time when I had been a first-year, but there were still plenty of them this time around.

Numerous guys had gone to beauty parlors and returned with new hairstyles, and many girls had adopted overexaggerated cutesy looks.

Classmates who were previously dull and unremarkable returned for the second semester with new, eye-catching visages!

I had been so taken aback last year! And so jealous!

I wanted to come out of *my* shell!

I was a male high schooler, just like the others! I wanted to dye my hair and dress up and flirt with girls! At least once! Maybe then, I'd finally be able to boost my popularity with the ladies!

Summer was the best chance to change your image and make progress

toward a high school guy's ultimate goal! Yep, to get a girlfriend!

"And then you can graduate from your virginity, right? Summer is practically a brick wall to guys like us," my glasses-wearing buddy Motohama remarked with a nod.

He was one of the two negative influences in my life.

"Hey, Motohama. Did you get that information we talked about?" I asked.

Another nod. "Yeah, Matsuda's just double-checking it now."

"Heeeeeeey! Issei, Motohama! I've got it!" declared the second negative influence in my life as he barged into the room with impeccable timing.

Yep, judging by his reaction, it sure looked like he had.

"You were right, Yoshida in the class next door *did* do it over summer! And with a third-year girl!"

"*Damn him!*" Motohama and I spat hatefully!

So it was true! That bastard Yoshida! Not only was he strutting around with a flashy new look and a stuck-up attitude, he had lost his virginity, too!

"Rumor has it that Ouba in our class did it with a first-year as well."

"Seriously?! Ouba?!"

I glanced around, only for the man in question to give us a wave and flash us an invigorated grin! Daaaaamn him! That cursed post-virgin!

In what kind of world was it fair for him to throw away his chastity so easily?! I wanted to get rid of *mine*!

Since the beginning of second semester last year, my two buddies and I had been gathering intel on what our peers had been up to during the vacation. It was a well-known fact that many high schoolers graduated from their virginity over the long break, and as virgins ourselves, we desperately wanted to know as much as possible!

I mean, how could you not be dying to know which of your classmates were still young and inexperienced and which weren't?!

According to our information, the percentage of guys who had learned the

carnal pleasures of sex had gone up this year compared to last! In other words, most of the guys in our class had already done it!

For high school guys like us, whether or not you got to sleep with a girl was a matter of status! And I hated the way those post-virgins looked down on people like us!

Their eyes all but said, *Ah, that poor soul still doesn't know what it's like to have a woman!*

Damn them all!

I laid my face down on my desk, clutching my head.

Argh! It wasn't supposed to be like this!

I'd had a plan! This was supposed to be the summer I came into my own! Instead, I'd been whisked off to the underworld! What kind of high schooler spent his summer down in Hell?!

I did! Me!

And not only that, the majority of my time there was spent running from a dragon hunting me! Sound unbelievable?! Of course it does! If I went around telling people that my precious second-year summer break had been wasted embroiled in a bitter life-and-death struggle with a literal monster, they'd lock me up!

In the end, the only erotic thing to happen during my summer break was our trip to the hot springs! That was it! Sure, that alone was fantastic compared to what I'd once had, but the true pleasure beyond that should have been within easy reach!

My first time with the prez! Getting into bed with Akeno! Making a baby with Xenovia!

I hadn't been able to do a single one of those things in the underworld!

Fortunately, neither Matsuda nor Motohama had experienced anything during the break, either. If they had reached that stage before me, I would've killed myself. Seriously.

"Greetings, Cherryboys," a bespectacled girl stated, snickering as she looked

down her nose at us.

“Kiryuu! Have you come to laugh?” Motohama questioned, indignant.

Our assailant nodded. “Hee-hee-hee. Knowing you three, I was sure you had an uneventful summer.”

“Shut up!”

“By the way, Hyoudou,” Kiryuu said, turning to me. “Asia has been acting a little distant lately. I don’t suppose you know why?”

I did. It was because of Diodora, no doubt. Even I could recognize that much.

She was acting unusually flustered during class, panicking whenever the teacher asked her a question, trying to read her textbooks upside down, that sort of thing.

That said, she was laughing like normal with the other girls right now...

Asia was one of the most popular figures in class, among both boys and girls. It was easy enough to understand why. Not only was she an incredible beauty, just talking with her was enough to heal anything afflicting your soul.

Some of the boys liked to talk to her more for that sense of healing than to confess their love. Rather than approaching her out of desire, they sought her out for that sense of comfort.

I couldn’t blame them. I also felt at ease whenever I was with her.

Realizing that I was watching her, Asia waved to me. She flashed me a smile... yet there was something undeniably awkward about it.

Hmm, yep, she’s worried all right.

Diodora’s proposal to her had left me at a loss.

As I sank deep in thought, Kiryuu stared down at me with suspicion.

“What is it?” I questioned.

“Oh, nothing. It just seems to me that you’re having more luck with girls this semester.”

—! Seriously?! Why?!

“Your face is more serious now, and with my eyes, I can see just how sturdy your body has become. Some of the girls have even started calling you a little *wild*.”

So that was it. I ran a hand over my cheek. I couldn’t deny that I was a lot more fit and muscular now. That was what happened when you passed the summer training with a dragon. Admittedly, I had gone survivalist-mode during that time.

Still, wild, huh? I see. Heh-heh-heh. I guess people *had* noticed, then. Perhaps my charms had leveled up? Was I finally catching some female eyes?

“Heh-heh-heh, I’ve been working out. Well, you might even say I’ve grown over the summer,” I admitted with a grin, cupping my chin in my hand.

Kiryuu’s shoulders slumped. “...If only you weren’t so full of yourself.”

Wh-what’s with that look of disappointment...? I didn’t get it.

“E-everyone! This is big!”

All of a sudden, one of my classmates dashed into the room. What was going on?

He took a mouthful from a bottle of mineral water that one of his friends handed him, calmed himself a little, and then announced so that everyone could hear: “There’s a new transfer student coming! A girl!”

There was a momentary pause, and then—

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?!” The whole class erupted in shock.

“It may be an unusual time of year for it, but we’ll have a new face in our class starting today.” So announced our teacher. Immediately, the whole room bubbled with excitement.

I mean, seriously, it was a girl! Getting worked up was only natural!

Some girls were probably taken aback by the reaction of us boys, but even they were curious to see who the new addition would be.

“All right, then. Come on in,” our teacher instructed.

The door slid open.

“Whooooooooaaaaa!” swelled a cry of joy from the guys.

A tall, chestnut-haired beauty entered the room.

I, however, was far more shocked than thrilled by her appearance. So much so that my eyes all but popped out of my face.

Glancing across the room, I noticed that Xenovia was just as stupefied.

It was a perfectly natural reaction! Anyone who recognized this girl as we did would have been equally stunned!

The chestnut-haired transfer student bowed her head and introduced herself with a soft smile. She was wearing a glimmering necklace around her throat—a crucifix. Unlike the last time we’d met, her hair was done up in pigtails now, but there was no mistaking her identity!

“My name is Irina Shidou. It’s a pleasure to meet you all.”

Yes, it was none other than Xenovia’s former partner, who had come with her to Japan to retrieve the stolen Excaliburs earlier this year—Irina Shidou!



“Come with us for a minute, will you?”

During lunch break, Xenovia and I approached Irina—who stood at the center of a ceaseless whirlwind of questions from our classmates—grabbed her by the hand, and whisked her off to a place where we could have a little privacy.

Irina was a former childhood friend of mine. She had moved overseas back when we had both been kids, where she had received the blessing of the Protestant denomination of the Christian Church and become a Holy Sword user.

She had returned to our hometown with Xenovia a few months ago, after several of the Excaliburs had been taken from the Church by one of the fallen angel leaders.

Xenovia became a demon in Rias’s Familia after learning of God’s demise, remaining with us in Japan. Irina, however, had returned to the Church’s headquarters.

We hadn’t seen her at all since then... To think that she would pop up again

here of all places...

Yep, I was shocked all right. Completely flabbergasted. This didn't mean we were enemies now, did it? I mean, the three great powers *had* agreed to a peace treaty. So what was she doing here?

"Howdy, Issei! And Xenovia!"

Wha—?!

She caught us both in a wide-armed hug!

"Xenovia! I'm so glad you're well! Things might be a little awkward between us now, given our new positions, but I'm still happy to see you!"

"Ah, yeah, it's been a while, Irina. It's good to see you, too... But is this supposed to be some kind of punishment? I mean, that cross around your neck kind of hurts..." Nonetheless, Xenovia smiled at her old companion.

A reunion of the former Holy Sword duo...

While I was busy sorting out my thoughts, Xenovia piped up with the first question. "What are you doing here?"

Yep, it was a simple thing to ask, but clearly the most important.

"I've transferred here on Archangel Michael's orders. I'll tell you more after school. You're all based in the old school building, right?" Irina asked with a cute wink.

I pulled out my phone and hurriedly typed a message to the prez. DID YOU KNOW THAT IRINA SHIDOU IS HERE?

It wasn't long before I received her response. YES. IT WAS DECIDED AT THE LAST MINUTE. I'LL EXPLAIN AFTER CLASS. IN THE MEANTIME, KEEP HER COMPANY. SHE IS STILL A TRANSFER STUDENT, AFTER ALL.

Ah, so Rias did know. Of course she did. This school was practically her fortress. There was no way that Irina would be able to just stroll in without the prez knowing.

I would just have to wait to find out what my old childhood friend was doing here.

"Welcome to Kuou Academy, Irina Shidou."

Each of the members of the Occult Research Club, along with Chairwoman Sona from the student council and our instructor, Azazel, had gathered in the clubroom after school. Incidentally, Koneko was sitting on my lap. That had all but officially become her designated seat.

“Thank you, everyone! It’s great to be here! I’ve met some of you before, but some of your faces are new. I’m Irina Shidou! I’ve come to Kuou Academy as an emissary of the Church—or rather, of the angels!”

Clap-clap-clap.

We, the members of the Occult Research Club, applauded her self-introduction.

From Irina’s explanation, I gathered that she had been deployed here as a support member from Heaven. Thinking about it, I realized that Kuou Academy already hosted demons and fallen angels, but no angels.

At the very least, with Irina here, it looked like we would be receiving some backup from Heaven if needed.

With that, Irina started muttering things like “Praise the Lord” and “Michael is great.” We all listened on with forced smiles.

Evidently, her faith was just as resolute as ever...

I turned to Xenovia. There was something I had been meaning to ask her.

“H-hey, Xenovia?” I asked quietly.

“What? And why are you whispering?”

“Irina doesn’t know about God’s death, right?”

“She didn’t when we parted ways, at least.”

I had thought as much.

Was this really a good idea? Everyone else here knew the truth. If Irina were to find out from one of us, wasn’t it possible that the shock might drive her toward doing something reckless?

And that’s when Azazel mercilessly blurted it out. “Hey, you do realize that your biblical God is dead, right?”

“T-Teeeeeeaaaaach! You can’t just reveal that to her all of a sudden!” I cried.

Azazel, however, let out a sigh. “Idiot. She wouldn’t have been ordered here if she didn’t know. This school is one of the most important areas of cooperation between the three great powers. Anyone assigned here has to know the truth to some degree.”

Irina nodded along to Azazel’s explanation. “Of course, Governor of the Fallen Angels. Don’t worry, Issei. I’m aware of the Lord’s passing.”

Seriously? I really did feel like an idiot now for worrying about her!

“You’re surprisingly tough,” Xenovia observed. “I wouldn’t have thought that you, with your devout faith, would be able to withstand the shock of learning the truth.”

After a short pause, Irina’s eyes flooded with tears. She drew close to Xenovia and all but shouted, “You think I wasn’t devastated?! The Lord is my spiritual support! The center of my universe! The omnipotent Father of all creation! And He’s deeeeeeeaaaad?! I’ve spent my whole life living by His teachings, so when Archangel Michael told me what had happened, I was so depressed that I slept for a full seven days and nights! Arghhhhh! Oh, Lord!”

Irina wailed in lamentation as she laid her face down on the table. Well, for someone so ingrained in faith, the death of God *would* come as a shock. My family wasn’t particularly religious, so I didn’t have any firsthand experience of what she must have been going through, but I did know that when Asia had learned the truth, she had almost fainted.

“I know how you feel.”

“Me too.”

Asia and Xenovia tried to soothe Irina, the three of them embracing one another in a tight hug.

Both Asia and Xenovia still regularly prayed to God. From what I could tell, they were immensely grateful to Him.

“Asia! I’m sorry about calling you a witch last time! And I said such horrible things to you, too, Xenovia! I hope you can both forgive me!”

The other girls smiled at Irina's apology.

"I don't mind. I hope we can all be friends from now on. We all believe in and cherish the Lord."

"Same here. It was my fault we parted ways like that. I was in such turmoil that I ended up reincarnating as a demon. But I'm happy we've got this chance to meet again."

"Oh, Lord!"

The three broke out into prayer...

Was this a reconciliation of sorts, then? It had been a long time coming, but I was glad to see the rift between them beginning to heal. So long as they were happy, that was all that mattered.

Perhaps this was the birth of a Church Maiden Trio? That said, two of them were *demons*...

"I'm guessing you're Michael's messenger?" Azazel asked.

Irina nodded. "Yes, Governor Azazel. Archangel Michael was worried there wasn't anyone representing Heaven here. He believed that lack of local staff was an issue."

"Yeah, he mentioned something like that when I spoke to him as well. The great powers of Heaven and the underworld are all operating here, but the only ones on the ground are Rias, Sona, their Familia members, and a few others, myself included. That's enough to keep things functioning, but Michael is so uptight that he wanted an agent of Heaven to stick around, too. Heaven's already providing more support in the form of their backup system than we could possibly ask for. I told him he didn't need to bother, but he obviously sent you to us regardless." Azazel let out a resigned sigh.

Hmm, so that's how it is.

It *was* a little strange that there were only demons and fallen angels here, so it made sense for Heaven to want to send one or two of their own to keep an eye on things.

That said, the prez's fortress was really starting to feel crowded... At first,

there had only been a few demons. Now, fallen angels and members of the Church were laughing over idle banter in the same room.

You never knew what life had in store, huh?

The prez had seemed a little disconcerted earlier, but it looked like she was coming around to the idea after having discussed it with her brother, the Demon King Sirzechs. There were undeniable benefits to keeping someone from Heaven around, and Rias's involvement in all this was a very prestigious responsibility.

Irina suddenly rose to her feet and put her hands together in prayer. At that moment, her whole body was enveloped in a flash of light—and brilliant white wings sprouted from her back?!

Huuuuuh?! She looks just like an angel! No, hold on—is she an angel?!

Everyone else present watched in shock, except Azazel, who was unfazed. “Irina Shidou, huh? Have you been Angelized?”

“Angelized? Is that even possible?” I gawked.

Azazel shrugged. “No, there's no record of such a thing. That said, scientists from Heaven and the underworld were working on theories about the concept a while back...” He narrowed his eyes in thought while staring at those luminous wings.

Irina nodded. “Yes. Archangel Michael gave me his blessing, and I was reborn as an angel. Apparently, it was made possible by adapting technology received from the demon and fallen angel factions.”

What on earth?! When had the cooperation among the three great powers reached such a level? I had heard that the angels hadn't been able to reproduce or increase their numbers since God's demise, but if they could reincarnate humans to bolster their ranks, then that issue seemed solved.

So Irina was an angel now? Demon, fallen angel, and angel. Kuou Academy now had all three sides.

Irina continued to explain. “The Four Great Seraphs, along with another six noteworthy ones, devised a system to each recruit twelve Brave Saints, ranking

them from Ace to Queen. The role of King is reserved for the angel leading the team.”

Azazel was following Irina’s words with obvious interest. He loved talking about new technologies and that sort of thing. “I see. You took the demon Evil Pieces system and merged it with the artificial Sacred Gear technology that we fallen angels devised. Damn, you sure didn’t waste any time putting it all to use, huh? I guess since the demon system is modeled on chess, the angel one is based on cards? Well, a trump is what you call a promoted card in a trick-taking game, so I suppose it makes sense. With God dead, there’s no other way to get any more pure-blooded angels. This is a way to rebuild your forces.”

Basically, the angels had devised their own version of the Evil Pieces system. Who’d have thought that was possible?

“If that’s how it works, there should also be a Joker somewhere in that set of cards, a particularly powerful figure. And the twelve members are also modeled after the twelve apostles, I take it? Ah, that Archangel sure knows how to keep things interesting.” Azazel began to chuckle to himself under his breath. He did like to read into these things.

“Hey, which card are you, Irina?” I inquired, curious.

“I’m an Ace!” she declared, puffing out her chest. “Hee-hee-hee, I’m honored to serve Archangel Michael! I don’t mind if I perish! The Lord might have passed, but living as Archangel Michael’s Ace is purpose enough for me!”

Her eyes were positively sparkling! There was even a large letter A on the back of her left hand.

“Oh? So Michael gave you a new lease on life?” I muttered with a sigh.

“It’s preferable to her losing her mind,” Xenovia answered by my side.

Well, that was for sure. Working under a new master was better than falling into despair over the loss of God.

“Also, Archangel Michael said that he was researching whether he could stage a kind of Rating Game between Evil Pieces and Brave Saints in the future! Right now, only seraphs have cards of their own, but he’s hoping to expand the system to other high-ranking angels, too, so they can compete and improve

themselves like you demons do!”

The Rating Game?! Angels?! And between Evil Pieces and Brave Saints, no less?!

While the members of the Occult Research Club were taken aback by this announcement, Azazel looked impressed. “There are a lot of angels and demons who don’t see eye to eye with their leaders about this newfound state of peace. That’s only natural, I guess, seeing how long we’ve all been at one another’s throats. Yet Michael’s sure thought this through. He’s basically offering a way for everyone to vent their frustration on each other in small-scale proxy wars. Not unlike the World Cup or the Olympics here in the human realm.”

Was all this about providing disgruntled angels with an outlet for their frustration? It looked like each of the three factions was adopting new political measures to accommodate one another... Peace sure wasn’t easy, huh?

“Does that mean we could end up fighting against a team of angels, then?” I asked.

Azazel nodded. “Maybe in the future. I’d give it at least ten...maybe twenty years. You rookie demons should be able enjoy yourselves plenty before then, I’d wager.”

Twenty years... That was a long time to wait. But then, demons and angels *did* have long life spans.

“Sounds like it will be interesting,” Chairwoman Sona remarked coolly, her enthusiasm plain to see.

“Interesting. *Very* interesting.” Kiba looked equally excited by that prospect. Our Familia’s ace was raring to go.

“Churches are scary...” Gasper wore a conflicted expression. According to rumor, as the peace treaty didn’t include vampires yet, the Christian Church was still conducting vampire hunts.

Indeed, the Church’s teachings hadn’t changed in any visible way, despite our new alliance. They were working behind the scenes to cooperate with the demon and fallen angel factions, however.

I had even heard something about them setting up dedicated teams to prevent any new forms of evil from arising.

Both Rias's Familia and Sona Sitri's had been granted the authority to arrest anyone from any of the three factions we believed presented a threat. Admittedly, even with that right, I wanted to avoid such situations as much as possible. We were all starting to get along now, after all...

Nothing beat peace.

I was just glad these new Brave Saints wouldn't affect the Rating Game for the time being. We had enough on our plate just dealing with the other young high-class demons.

"I think that's enough discussion for now," Chairwoman Sona declared with a smile. "What do you say we get our welcome party for Irina Shidou underway?"

Irina glanced around at each of us once more. "Demons! Everyone! I've been your enemy up till now, and I've even destroyed some of your kind! However, Archangel Michael says that we all need to be friends from now on, so I really, really want to get along with you all! Truly, I do! I'll do my best as the representative from the Church! I'm looking forward to working with you all!"

And with that, Irina entered the ranks of Kuou Academy.

The members of the student council soon joined us to hold a festive welcome for our newest student.



Irina's first few days at school passed uneventfully.

"Yes, yes! I'll do it! I'll take part in the scavenger hunt!" she called out, raising her hand high into the air.

Her eager nature had won her the admiration of everyone in class, boys and girls alike.

We were currently in homeroom, deciding who would be responsible for what activities in the upcoming Sports Festival.

...Ah.

I, on the other hand, was laying my head on my desk, letting out a resigned

sigh.

For some reason, arrangements had been made for Irina to live at my house. During the summer, my family home had been transformed into an extravagant six-story building with an additional three-floor basement.

Almost every member of the Occult Research Club had moved in, and now Irina was living with us, too.

Well, there *was* plenty of space, so it wasn't like it would make much of a difference if we had one or two extra people staying with us. Unfortunately, I was quickly realizing that keeping up with so many women under one roof was surprisingly difficult.

Apart from my mom, they were all gorgeous young beauties! It was a dream home for a high school guy like me!

Or so I had thought. Sadly, reality wasn't quite so rosy. I had discovered the truth to the saying "Three women make a market." There may have been plenty of room, but there was nowhere for me to relax...

For example, let's say that Asia, Xenovia, and Irina all got together to talk about girl stuff. It was practically impossible for me to get in on the conversation! And then Koneko might join them, only excluding me further!

I was the only guy there, you know? What was I supposed to talk about? Video games? Manga? What was I thinking, assuming that a sex-obsessed teenager like me had anything in common with a bunch of young ladies in the first place?!

I grew so lonely at times, I went searching for my two elder sister figures, only to find the prez and Akeno engrossed in their own kind of girl talk! Barging in and cozying up to them would only leave me feeling worse!

Arghhhhhhhhhh!

I was in a crisis! I was a mere gutless guy who couldn't cope with having so many attractive women around!

At this rate, how was I ever going to become a harem king?! Yet again, I was forced to realize my own inability and incompetence!

In a harem, you had to be able to satisfy lots of girls all at once! If I was already struggling, what hope did I have?!

I didn't even know what to say to them!

Should I try to research women's fashion or something?! Or maybe find a stylish store somewhere to mention to them?!

I had no idea! What on earth were you supposed to talk about with a group of girls?!

This was why I was so unpopular! And that realization only depressed me further!

Still, it wasn't like they were constantly shutting me out, so perhaps it was still okay. We all got along fairly well, most of the time. The girls had their own lives, right? Perhaps I was overthinking it all...

There *were* erotic situations every now and then. However, it was downright terrifying when they started fighting with one another...

...Huh? Suddenly, I felt very strange. Wasn't this the life I had always dreamed of? Why was I so stressed?

Were harems supposed to be this hard to manage...?

Ugh... Tannin, down there in the underworld, tell me what to do. I'm young and suffering.

"Hyoudou."

Out of nowhere, Kiryuu spoke my name. She was standing in front of the blackboard, which had lists of the various Sports Festival activities written on it.

"There's a tear in your shirt, under your armpit."

"Huh? Seriously?"

I raised my arm into the air to double-check—and realized my mistake too late.

Obviously, there was no rip!

"Okay, then! It's decided!" she declared, scribbling my name up on the blackboard.

“What?! No fair, Kiryuu!”

She got me! I had let my guard down, and Kiryuu had pounced!

Heedless of my complaints, she merely burst out into a lecherous laugh! “Thanks for volunteering to take part in the three-legged race. You’ll be partnered with...” She pointed her piece of chalk toward the girls across the room...

Immediately, Asia timidly raised her hand into the air!

“Asia! The two of you can run together!”

And so, thanks to the Craftswoman’s machinations, I was paired with Asia for the three-legged race.



The following day, everyone at the academy started practicing for the Sports Festival.

My classmates and I changed into our tracksuits and were practicing on the sports field.

“I challenge you to a race, Xenovia!”

“Bring it on, Irina!”

The two former Holy Sword partners were both charging across the grounds, my classmates cheering them both on.

Seriously, what were the two of them thinking...? They were both so fast, all but tearing across the concourse! Perhaps I should have expected no less from a demon and an angel? Were the Sports Festival a girls-only affair, with them on our side, our class might even win. Our only real competition would be the members of the student council: the Sitri Familia.

“...They’re too damn fast. I can’t make out the movements of their breasts.”

“You can say that again.”

“Still, you need to build up a good amount of speed to get them to bounce.”

Matsuda, Motohama, and I—the so-called Perverted Trio—had our gazes latched on to the movements of the girls’ chests.

Whether they were big or small, it was hard to keep your eyes off them once they started swaying up and down like that! Tracksuits were the best!

Irina had a slender build, but she was considerably buxom. Come to think of it, that bondage-like battle suit she occasionally wore displayed her body quite well, too.

At that moment, a familiar voice called out to me. “Hey, Hyoudou.”

“Ah, Saji.”

It was my fellow Pawn from the Sitri Familia, carrying what looked like a stopwatch and other measuring tools. “What are you doing?” he inquired.

“Keeping an eye out for bouncing breasts.”

“S-still the same as ever, I see,” he replied with a sigh.

Huh? Saji’s right arm was heavily bandaged. Was he injured?

“What happened there?” I asked.

“Hmm? Ah, this?” He pulled the bandage back a little—revealing a series of snakelike marks all over the limb.

“...What the hell is *that*?” I questioned with apprehension.

“According to Azazel, it’s the result of the way I fought against you during our Rating Game. Apparently, draining the blood of the Red Dragon Emperor with one of my lines when you went into Balance Breaker mode must have had some kind of effect on me. Even if the line wasn’t directly linked to me, I’ve ended up absorbing something from you.”

“Seriously? Is it bad?”

“No, it doesn’t seem to have had any negative effects. It just keeps making these things appear on my body. Like here, see?” He showed me a small jewellike object on the back of his arm.

...At first glance, it resembled a gemstone, but I soon realized it was identical to the jewels that characterized dragon-type Sacred Gears like mine, Vali’s, and Azazel’s.

“...So you got cursed or something?” I asked.

Saji's expression turned sour. "Ugh. Don't say it like that. I'm worried about it, too, you know... There aren't a whole lot of good stories about Vritra..." He paused there to regain his composure before asking: "By the way, what are you competing in, Hyoudou?"

"The three-legged race. With Asia."

"Gah! You bastard! As if I couldn't be any more jealous of you! And here I am in the bread-eating race."

The bread-eating race, huh? That sounded fun, too, but I would stick to running with Asia.

Jealousy was written large on Saji's face, when two bespectacled young women approached behind him.

"Saji, what are you doing here? We need to make sure the tents are set up properly. Come on now."

"The student council is already short on staffers, so you had better pull your weight."

Chairwoman Sona and Vice-Chairwoman Shinra were both chiding Saji, their glasses gleaming.

"R-right, Chairwoman! Vice-Chairwoman!" he shrieked, flustered, rushing to them.

The chairwoman and her deputy sure looked strict... Speaking of glasses, that next head of the House of Astaroth down in the underworld also wore them to a cool and serious effect. Did all demons with glasses possess that characteristic?

Saji waved at me as he headed across the sports field with the chairwoman and vice-chairwoman.

"Vritra..."

Huh? Did you say something, Ddraig? I thought to the dragon within me.

"No, don't let it concern you. It just looks like being in contact with me has accelerated his growth. At this rate, it won't matter how many pieces his soul was divided into."

Seriously, I didn't have a clue what any of that meant.

"Fafnir and Vritra are already near to hand. And you've already met Tannin, of course. It looks like my present host is building connections with each of the Dragon Kings..."

With that, Ddraig, contemplative, seemed to sink into a world of his own.

"Asia! Did your breasts grow over summer?"

"Kyagh! Kiryuu! D-don't touch them, please!"

That pervert was sexually harassing Asia again. Seriously, it felt like I only had to take my eyes off her for a second for her to get into trouble... I would have to warn Asia about her once more. I mean, the innocent little sister type in my life was already picking up a whole lot of erotic mannerisms from the prez and Akeno...

In any case, it was probably about time that Asia and I got around to training for our event.

I took what we needed for the three-legged race from our class's equipment area and knotted a rope that we could use.

"Asia! Let's practice!"

"Y-yes!"

With a quick bow of her head to Kiryuu, Asia came running my way.

The other guys and girls in our class had already started practicing in pairs. There were a few who were making good progress but many more who couldn't keep their movements in concert with each other. There were also a good many who were clearly shy and embarrassed to be tied together.

I tied the rope around my leg and Asia's.

"All right then, let's go, Asia!" I said, taking a few trial steps and placing my arm around her waist.

"O-okay!" Asia was clearly embarrassed, but that didn't stop her from putting her arm around my waist, too.

Hmm, her hair smells nice... Our bodies are all but pushing against each

other... Hers feels so soft...

No, I couldn't! I had to shake off these thoughts! This was Asia we were talking about! I needed to exercise self-restraint!

We both took a deep breath, exchanged nods, and stepped forward.

"All right," I began. "One, two—"

Argh! Our legs got caught together, our balance crumbling!

"Whoa!"

"Kyagh!"

I quickly caught Asia in my arms before she could fall flat to the ground!

"...S-sorry. I guess I need to try to match your pace, Asia," I said.

That was when I realized that Asia's face had turned bright red. She looked to be holding something back.

Huh? What? Hmm?

My right hand was cupping something delightfully soft...

Without me even realizing it, my hand had landed right on Asia's breast when she had begun to fall!

Hmm, it certainly felt larger than I remembered it being the last time I saw it...!

No! It was wrong to feel her up like this! I pulled my hand away from it!

"S-sorry! I didn't mean to!" I apologized.

What had I just done?! Asia was important to me, someone I treasured, and I had grabbed her chest! But it had felt so *good*!

"...I-it's all right... I'm okay with it. J-just tell me next time, please... I need to prepare myself..."

Was she saying that it was okay?! No, I must have misunderstood! Asia was misunderstanding! I hadn't meant to touch it!

I stood there, self-loathing and a raging libido battling inside me. Once I managed to slow my breathing, I said, "A-anyway, let's keep going."

“O-okay. I’m sorry, I’m no good at sports.” Asia looked crestfallen.

“That’s fine. The point is to match each other’s rhythm. It’s all about working in combination.”

“C-combination...?” Asia questioned with her head adorably tilted to one side.

Why did everything she did have to be so debilitatingly cute?!

“That’s right. We need to work together and take it one step at a time. Once we get the hang of it, we’ll be able to take off at a run.”

“I understand.”

Yep. This was no different from my training. You just had to take it step by step. Practice made perfect. I might not have been good for much else, but I had learned that much.

“Let’s try it again, then!”

“Okay!”

And so Asia and I synced up our movements and slowly began to press forward.



After school, I made my way to the clubroom with Asia, Xenovia, and Irina.

The other club members, the prez included, had arrived before us, each of them wearing dark frowns.

Huh? What’s going on?

“Has something happened?” I asked.

“You could say that,” the prez replied with a nod. “Our next Rating Game opponent has been decided.”

Ah. Already? I had heard that there were going to be several matches among the six young demon Familias, starting with our recent bout against the Sitri Familia. We were going to have to face each of them sooner or later. I wasn’t particularly surprised by this, but the prez’s next words were explanation enough for everyone’s dour expressions.

“Our next opponent...will be Diodora Astaroth.”

“—!”

That revelation left me speechless. Surely, this had to be some kind of bad joke?

Life.2

Asia's Troubles

"One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four."

Asia and I were behind the gymnasium, practicing again for the three-legged race. Xenovia had come to join us. Lately, we'd been spending a lot of mornings like this.

We'd improved quite a bit since that embarrassing fall, now able to run together at the pace of a brisk walk.

"Ah! One, two! Ah! Three, four!"

Asia was doing her best to keep up with me.

Yep, it was all about daily practice. It was hard work, but with persistence, we would pull through no matter how long it took. Heh-heh-heh. I had come to realize the importance of perseverance after my many hours of training with the prez, Azazel, and Tannin.

"Great. You've got a good rhythm going. How about you try running for real now?" Xenovia suggested as she tightened the rope around our legs.

I glanced at Asia and saw her looking unexpectedly gloomy.

"..."

Huh? Is she worried about something...? That was pretty understandable. Our next opponent was Diodora, after all. Ever since that announcement had been made public, Asia had seemed somewhat depressed.

"Asia, is there anything you wanna talk about?" I suggested.

Her frown deepened for a moment before she responded, "...I don't regret saving him."

Back when Asia had been a full-fledged member of the Church, she had

rescued a wounded demon from death with her healing abilities. These actions resulted in the Church branding Asia a heretic and stripping her of her role and position, setting off a sequence of traumatic incidents for her.

The demon whom she had saved was none other than Diodora. I had no idea what he was doing there or how Asia had found him, but there was no doubting that it was her innate kindness that had driven her to aid him. I couldn't blame her for that. She was a gentle soul.

After saving Diodora, however, Asia's life had been thrown upside down. Fortunately, she'd found a new happiness with me and the others.

All the same, it made me wonder. Would she have been better off remaining as a Holy Maiden?

Recently, I'd been kicking around an idea. Would Michael allow her to return to her former role if I asked him?

I had to admit, it seemed unlikely. If she returned to the Church or any related institutions, her abilities could adversely affect the system that God had put in place and that was maintained by the Church and its adherents.

Still, wasn't it possible that she could recover at least a semblance of her former life?

If I asked her, would she choose to go back there? But I was so afraid of that possibility that I hadn't found the courage to voice that question to her.

I didn't want to lose Asia...

It was selfish of me; I knew that. Perhaps the prez would be able to do something if I mentioned it to her...but I couldn't.

I didn't want to have to imagine life without Asia...

"...Issei?" the beautiful blond asked, tilting her head in concern. "You look worried... And a little sad..."

"...Asia, if you could have your old life back, would you want it?"

"—." Her eyes widened in surprise at this question.

Idiot that I was, I had just come out and asked it. Even though it risked losing

her. But I only wanted what was best for her...

My heart racing, I braced myself for Asia's answer. I could feel my hand, gripping her tightly, grow sweaty.

Despite my anxiety, her response was simple: "I wouldn't go back."

She was smiling. There was no hint of hesitation in her voice.

"Don't you remember? I asked you whether I could stay by your side forever. And you said yes."

...Ah.

That had been before our battle against Riser Phenex's Familia.

"I like it here. Kuou Academy, the Occult Research Club. I love everyone. The president, Akeno, Azazel, Kiba, Xenovia, Koneko, Gasper, Irina, Kiryuu...and you, Issei, and your parents. This new life that I've found is so precious and important to me. Every single day is filled with fun. I'm so happy to be with you all."

Asia...

I—I really was stupid. I should have realized that she was happy with how things were. Why did I have to ask such a stupid question of her...?!

I hugged Asia's shoulders. "Right, you and I are going to be together forever, Asia! I don't ever want you to go off somewhere to get married! Please don't think too much about Diodora. No matter what happens, you can always say no if you don't like it, okay?"

Asia blinked back at me for a second before flashing me a bright smile. "Yes."

At that moment, Xenovia, her expression somehow remorseful, spoke up: "...Asia, I want to apologize to you again. When we first met, I said some pretty mean things to you. I still regret it... You're always so kind. And you've been willing to be my...f-f-friend..."

Whoa!

It wasn't every day that Xenovia blushed like that. She had turned scarlet!

Asia took her hands in her own and responded with a broad smile: "Yes.

We're friends, Xenovia."

They were straightforward words, said with the utmost honesty.

Xenovia's eyes teared up. "Thank you. Thank you, Asia."

I nodded. Even I was getting emotional. Asia was such a gentle spirit, so kind and caring. She was my pride and joy!

"Ughhhhh! That's so touching..."

In the midst of that emotional scene came a loud sob.

I glanced around—only to find Irina watching.

"Irina. What are you doing here?"

"*Hic*, well... Xenovia invited me. She said mornings at Kuou Academy aren't to be missed. And she was right. Look at this beautiful display of friendship. This must be another of the Lord's and Archangel Michael's blessings..." Seeming deeply moved, Irina began to pray to the heavens.

"You didn't join the Occult Research Club, though, did you?" I asked.

Irina wiped away her tears, her mood undergoing a sudden shift as she gave me a big thumbs-up. "Nope, I went for another one. Or rather, I decided to make my own!"

"So you're starting your own club? What's it called?"

"Oh-ho-ho, brace yourselves!" Irina declared proudly, puffing out her chest. "It's called Irina Shidou's Love Salvation Club! Our mission is simple: to save others without asking for anything in return! Ah, with my steadfast belief, I'll offer my love for the one true faith to these sinful pagans in the name of the Lord and Archangel Michael!" Adopting a strange pose, the chestnut-haired girl began to pray to the heavens once more.

Her eyes were positively glittering.

But what was with that name? It didn't sound like the kind of club that people would rush to sign up for.

"...Er, right. Well, good luck," I responded as best I could.

"You can count on me!" Irina boasted, thumping her chest with her hand.

“And don’t be shy about letting me know if the Occult Research Club is in trouble. Rias has asked me to help out with the race between the different clubs, too!”

I let out a deep sigh. I guess that meant Irina would be joining us for the Sports Festival.

“By the way, how many people are in your club?” I inquired.

“Just me so far! It isn’t official, so there aren’t any formal activities or funds available. I still need to convince Chairwoman Sona.”

That wouldn’t be easy. The chairwoman was a tough one, as was her vice-chairwoman.

It would probably take a long time for Irina to get her club authorized.

“Anyway, for the time being, my name’s been put down in the Occult Research Club.”

Hold on, doesn’t that mean that she technically is a member?! Eh, pointing that out now won’t accomplish anything.

In any event, I calmed myself and said, “Anyway, let’s keep practicing.”

Xenovia and Irina paired up for three-legged race practice, and off we went.

“Phew. I—I’m a little tired...” Asia huffed as she tugged at her tracksuit.

We had spent much of the morning running and were now in the storeroom at the corner of the school grounds to put away the ropes we had used for practice.

Probably because I was so used to physical activity, I wasn’t particularly tired, but I was nonetheless mentally exhausted having been constantly worried about Asia. It was still early in the day, so I decided to take a break in the clubroom before heading to class.

Just as I was about to leave, there was a *click* and the sound of a door slamming shut.

I was locked in...! I glanced around, only to find Xenovia standing with her back to the door.

Wh-what's going on...?

Asia likewise tilted her head in confusion. "What is it? Xenovia?"

Xenovia's expression turned serious. "Asia, I know what you did. It's commonplace for girls our age to have secret liaisons with boys."

...

...Huh? What did she just say? I couldn't believe my ears.

"S-secret liaisons?" Asia repeated with evident uncertainty.

"The kind where you get a boy to play with your breasts," Xenovia responded plainly.

—!

Wh-wh-what on earth?! How could she make an assertion like that in a place like this?! And so suddenly?! And after locking us all in here?! And with Asia present?! Seriously! I couldn't comprehend how her mind worked! To top it all off, she was clearly overthinking all that about secret liaisons!

"B-b-b-breasts...?!" Asia exclaimed in a high-pitched voice, her cheeks turning scarlet.

"Xenovia! You can't just start blabbering about dirty stuff for no good reason!"

"Shut up for a minute, Issei. I'm talking to Asia. I'll deal with you in a second. Sorry about this, but why don't you do some warm-ups over there in the corner? This is going to be very intense."

What exactly is going to be intense? Warm-ups?! What does she want me to do, practice opening and closing my hand?!

However, Xenovia didn't stop there. "There's a girl in our class who's been hooking up with her boyfriend regularly. I've looked into it. She has him play with her bust every day."

Why is she just laying all this out so matter-of-factly?! And how exactly had she been "looking into" this?!

"Asia. Don't you think it's time we experienced that for ourselves?" Xenovia

questioned, putting her hands on her friend's shoulders and staring into her eyes.

What?! When did this become so serious?!

"E-EEK! Th-this... It's all s-so soon..." Asia was at a total loss! Of course she was! Her reaction was completely natural!

"Don't worry. It sounds like it tickles a bit at first, but once you get used to the sensation, it feels really good. I'm sure that if you can get used to being close to each other, it will help you win the three-legged race."

How far is she willing to take this?! Xenoviaaaaa?!

"...I-is that what he meant by c-combination...?"

You can't seriously be falling for this! Are you truly okay with her suggestion, Asia?!

Xenovia flashed the still-uncertain Asia a warm smile. "It's okay. We're friends after all."

"That's true..."

"So let's do it together. There's nothing to be afraid of if we're both here."

"...R-really? D-do you think so...?"

Is that it?! Have they made their decision?! Xenovia, don't poison Asia's innocent mind!

Seemingly deciding that the matter was settled, Xenovia faced me. "Let's do it, then. I want to practice making babies as well."

"Hold on! You can't possibly mean here... Well, I guess I *have* always had a bit of a thing for this kind of atmosphere, but still!"

Xenovia, however, ignored me as she began to remove her shirt.

Plop. Her luscious breasts, cupped in a magnificent bra, appeared before me!

Bah!

Blood shot from my nose at this magical sight!

Xenovia's weren't as huge as Rias's or Akeno's, but they were still more than

ample! But I didn't have much time to stare in wonder before she unhooked her bra!

Plop!

With nothing left to support them, those glorious tits bounced up directly in front of me! Why did it feel as if all the girls around me were so aggressively eager to strip down in my presence?! Ah, but her nipples sure were an alluring shade of pink!

"I've never let anyone but Issei touch these. Do you remember how they feel?"

Of course I did! I had burned that precious memory into my mind! I may not have touched them directly, but I could tell that they were incredibly soft and supple! I had assumed that, like the rest of her warrior's body, they would be firm and muscular, but I was dead wrong! Xenovia's skin was so beautifully flawless and smooth! Like gigantic, delicious marshmallows!

Suddenly, I recalled the incident in the pool equipment room! Back then, completely out of the blue, she had suggested that we make a baby!

Did she have a fetish for storerooms or something?! Wasn't a bedroom the usual kind of place for this sort of event?! There was something undeniably thrilling about this setting, but it clearly wasn't normal!

"Come on, Asia. You too," Xenovia urged, approaching her.

Heeeey! What is she doing?!

She had put her hands on Asia's tracksuit top and was trying to strip it off her!

"B-but... I'm not ready yet..."

Asia squirmed back and forth, but she couldn't stop Xenovia from forcefully removing her clothes.

Before I knew it, Asia was down to her underwear! Her bra was too incredibly cute!



“It’s okay, Asia. If you’re nervous, I’ll do it with Issei first, okay? You can watch how we do it, and then you’ll know what to expect.”

“Huh...?! E-er...,” I fumbled.

“Heh-heh-heh. I’m kidding. I know you don’t want to let a latecomer like me go first.”

“Th-that isn’t what I...”

“Today’s our chance. The president and Akeno aren’t here. This might be our only opportunity to have a *secret liaison* with Issei.”

“—.”

Asia fell completely silent at that! Ugh, this conversation wasn’t going as I had anticipated. I could hardly keep up! No matter what, I couldn’t shake my gaze free from Xenovia’s milk-white breasts!

Click.

Xenovia stealthily unhooked Asia’s bra!

“...Ah.” Asia covered her exposed chest with her hands, her face flushing a deep shade.

Yes, that’s right! That’s how girls are supposed to react, Xenovia! You’re too forward! Thank you, though! I couldn’t have asked for anything more!

At that moment, Xenovia took my hand and pulled it toward her body!

“Whoa!”

I fell to the ground. When the dust settled, I realized that I was lying on one of the mats we used in gym class!

Gah!

Something appeared on top of me, swaying back and forth! Breasts, directly in my field of vision! Xenovia was straddling me!

She took my left hand and placed it on her chest!

Bah! My nosebleed wouldn’t stop!

I could feel a lethal suppleness course through my fingers as they dug in!

Xenovia's erect nipple pressing into the palm of my hand was filling me with an incredible thrill!

Hey, hey, hey! At this rate, I'm gonna reach my Balance Breaker all over again!

"Issei... I—I don't want to lose to the president again..." Asia, sitting down beside me, took my free hand and placed it on her—

Plop!

It wasn't as large as Xenovia's, but my fingers could make out every soft contour of that wonderful breast!

Asiaaaaa! I'm so happy to see how much you've grown! No, wait, that's not right!

"...Ngh..."

A sweet, intoxicating sound leaked from Xenovia's mouth. My brain was rendered completely powerless!

"Yep, I thought so. Having a man touch them is different. Completely different from doing it yourself. Now, Issei. Asia and I are both ready. You can start fondling them."

Maybe that was easy for Xenovia to say, but I was supposed to be Asia's protector! Yet my lustful hand was massaging her chest completely on instinct!

I mean, how could any man stop himself when faced with this?! Those breasts were all but begging me to touch them!

The prez's face flashed before my eyes!

Prezzzzzz!

How I wanted to do this with Rias—a *secret liaison*, as Xenovia put it. If she were to invite me to grope her like this, I—I...

Click!

The door suddenly swung open.

"...You were taking forever, so I... Wh-wh-wh-wh-what are you all doing?!"

Standing in the entrance was Irina!

This was bad! Two half-naked girls together with a guy! There was no explaining my way out of this!

Irina would probably have a distinctly Christian reaction, branding us as filthy or some such...

“D-do that in bed! This place is filthy!”

It looked like she was more concerned about an altogether different kind of filth.



After classes, I made my way to the clubroom.

I wished I could wipe the grin from my face, but because of what had happened this morning, the sensation of Asia's and Xenovia's breasts had lingered in my hands all day long.

A short distance away, Asia and Xenovia were busy playing reversi. I hadn't been able to make time to speak with them all day!

With the feeling of their tits on my palms, how could I?! I hadn't been able to concentrate on my schoolwork at all! Throughout class, the only thing on my mind had been breasts!

Xenovia's were wonderful. But Asia's were... No! I shook my head, trying to dispel those lewd thoughts! Asia was precious! I couldn't think of her like that!

Still, I couldn't deny that her body was maturing... At this rate, she might rival Rias or Akeno in, say, three years' time...

I had heard that demons could use their powers to adjust their physical appearances, at least to an extent. Was Asia perhaps unconsciously willing her breasts to grow...?

No, surely that was just a wild delusion on my part... Were it true, it would go beyond incredible...

“...What a lecherous face.”

Argh!

Half-expressionless, Koneko pinched my cheek.

“Ow, that huwts, Koneko!”

Perhaps it was my imagination, but it seemed that Koneko had started acting increasingly strict lately, almost like the prez...

No, she was always there to douse my spirits whenever I let myself get too fired up, especially when the object of my fantasies was one of the other female club members.

I must have been imagining it, right? That had to be the case, and yet I couldn't convince myself...

“It looks like we're all here.” Glancing across the room at each of us in turn, the prez pulled out what looked like a video recording.

“This has records of each battle fought by the other high-ranking demons we met in the underworld over summer. Our Familia is documented, too, of course.”

Battle records. Right, we were supposed to watch a video of a match today. A huge screen had already been set up in the room in preparation.

Azazel took his position beside the monitor and began to explain. “You weren't the only ones who fought in a Rating Game. Each of the other demon youths did, too. There were two other matches after yours: the princely House of Bael versus the Demon King Asmodeus's House of Glasya-Labolas, and the archducal House of Agares versus the Demon King Beelzebub's House of Astaroth. They're your future rivals, so watch carefully.”

“Yes,” we responded to Azazel's stern instructions.

Worry started to form a pit in my stomach. Exactly how strong were the other Familias? They were all supposed to be our peers, right? Did that mean they were around our level?

I could see that the rest of the Occult Research Club likely shared my concerns, as they each stared intently at the monitor. Even Koneko, resting on my lap, focused all her attention on it.

“We'll start with Sairaorg's match... The House of Bael versus the House of Glasya-Labolas.”

The prez's cousin against that good-for-nothing brute, Zephyrdor!

Azazel started the video, and we spent the next few hours reviewing how our future opponents battled.

It wasn't long before everyone's faces turned stern.

We were presented with overwhelming power, enough to make our excitement ebb as soon as we started watching.

The thuggish Zephyrdor, having lost all his pieces, fought Sairaorg in single combat, laying into his opponent with one strike after another.

The battle between their Familias was over. Both demons had strong servants, and those members had all fought well, but this was a contest between two Kings.

Astonishingly, Zephyrdor's every attack was deflected with ease. Even when he looked to have suffered a hit, Sairaorg fought back as though it was nothing.

Realizing that his attacks were ineffective, Zephyrdor grew more frenzied and impatient.

At that moment, Sairaorg unleashed a powerful flurry of punches!

Zephyrdor readied a sequence of defensive techniques, but the incoming barrage tore through them like paper, Sairaorg's fist digging deep into his enemy's stomach.

The strength behind that hit was obvious even through a recording—its intensity was enough to make the pair's surroundings tremble as though shaken by an earthquake.

Zephyrdor fell to the ground in agony, futilely gripping his gut.

Sairaorg had used nothing more than punches and kicks, but his attacks were on a whole other level! Whenever his target managed to avoid them, they ended up half-destroying the buildings behind him. The whole battlefield was a portrait of ruin and destruction.

It was as clear as day that being at the receiving end of one of those blows would be fatal!

“...The despised new heir to the House of Glasya-Labolas, that infamous degenerate, can’t even hold a candle to Sairaorg Bael. Is he really that powerful?” Kiba narrowed his eyes in astonishment at what he had just witnessed, his expression stern. If our Familia’s ace was concerned, we were really in trouble. He was probably mentally calculating just what it would take to defeat him.

On top of his raw strength, Sairaorg’s speed was nothing to sneeze at, either. I had been unable to follow his movements fully, and Kiba had looked totally focused while watching the recording. Had Kiba been able to keep up?

To think that Sairaorg could do all that empty-handed...

Gaspar was quivering, clinging to my arm with all his strength. I wanted to tell him to chill out...

“Rias, you and Sairaorg both have a tendency for throwing yourselves into one-on-one battles, never mind that you’re both Kings. Normally, a King can just let their pieces move forward and handle the match. You understand that if *you* are defeated, it’s over for everyone, right? All of you from the House of Bael are a little too hot-blooded, if you ask me.” Azazel let out a sigh.

The prez blushed with embarrassment. It was true that she did tend to throw herself in harm’s way more often than she should...

“So how strong is that Zephyrdor bastard?” I asked.

Rias was the one who answered. “Compared to others outside the six Houses, he certainly can’t be dismissed as weak. However, he’s only just stepped up to his current position since his family’s last heir died...”

Akeno continued where the prez left off: “In the official rankings issued by the Rating Game Steering Committee before everyone’s formal debuts over the summer, the House of Bael was placed first. Agares was second, followed by Gremory at third place, Astaroth at fourth, Sitri at fifth, and Glasya-Labolas at sixth. That assessment was calculated using the average strength of each King and their Familia. Although it does look like the results of the battles have upset that assessment, at least somewhat.”

“But only Sairaorg Bael is particularly outstanding, right?” I questioned.

The prez nodded. “Indeed. He’s a monster. Speculation has it that he’ll rise to the top in short order once he starts competing in official Rating Games. On the other hand, if we were to beat him, we would be able to make a good name for ourselves.”

Right. If he was considered the rising star, defeating him would be a testament to our prowess...

Unsure I wanted to hear the reply, I asked, “Is he stronger than Riser?”

Riser was supposedly immortal, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t be defeated. Still, he was an undeniably formidable opponent.

“I wouldn’t be able to say for sure without seeing them face off against each other directly, but my suspicion is that Sairaorg would come out on top.”

Ugh! He’s that incredible?! And we have to fight him before even being able to take part in so much as one official Rating Game?!

“Well, let’s take a look at the graphs. Each group has been given this information, just so you know,” Azazel stated before summoning up a holographic diagram at the front of the room.

The faces of the prez, the chairwoman, Sairaorg, and the other three promising demon youths appeared up top, with a grid divided into POWER, TECHNIQUE, SUPPORT, and WIZARD quadrants below it. It was written in easy-to-understand Japanese.

Next to that was another figure, this one labeled KING. The prez, the chairwoman, and the girl from the House of Agares were ranked quite highly, as was Sairaorg. Zephyrdor was the lowest placed of the bunch.

The prez’s highest stats were in the Wizard category—in other words, her specialty was using her demon powers to unleash magic. Her Power level was also decently high. When it came to Technique and Support, she was only marginally above average, however.

And then there was Sairaorg.

His Support and Wizard skills were clearly his weakness, but the problem was his Power level.

The bar rose straight to the ceiling! What an incredible growth trajectory! That overwhelming potential was too much to contemplate!

Of the remaining five individuals, Zephyrdor's Power level was the next highest, but Sairaorg's was still several times superior!

"Even in that one-on-one bout with Zephyrdor, Sairaorg didn't put his all into it," Azazel explained.

So he hadn't even been fighting for real there...? As I looked at his stats, I realized they possibly exceeded mine when I activated my Balance Breaker. Was it even possible to be that strong without drawing on the abilities of a legendary dragon?!

"Basically, Sairaorg is a fighting prodigy," I concluded.

I mean, no matter how you looked at it, his physical skills were *literally* off the charts.

Azazel, however, shook his head. "No, he's the first pure-blooded demon from the House of Bael to lack any particularly unique talents. He didn't inherit his lineage's affinity for destructive power, either. It's his cousins, the Gremory siblings, who seem to have taken over that legacy."

—.

That was an unexpected revelation.

The prez's mother was born to the House of Bael, and so had passed on the family's destructive talents to her own children, Rias and Sirzechs.

How ironic, then, that the heir to the House of Bael lacked his family's signature powers...

"But he's still the strongest demon youth, right?"

"Only by doing something that pure-blooded demons wouldn't normally dare. That's where his genius lies." Azazel's expression was stern.

"What do you mean?" I pressed.

"An intense amount of training. Sairaorg is a rare breed of pure-blooded demon, one whose powers are the result of an excessive amount of arduous

work. All he has is his body, so he's pushed it to its absolute limit."

This all came as a profound shock to me. I had thought that all high-class pure-blooded demons were naturally capable, endowed with unique powers.

Yet instead, the prez was blessed with ability, while Sairaorg wasn't.

Rias wore a complex expression as she watched the continuing match.

As if recounting a well-told story, Azazel went on. "Ever since he was small, Sairaorg kept losing over and over again. His peers possessed unique powers and were distinctive high-class pure-blooded demons one and all, but *his* path was stained with tears and blood."

Perhaps that explained it. Sairaorg had exuded an altogether different kind of pressure and confidence than the prez or the chairwoman.

"And that talentless individual was selected to be the next heir to his House. That in and of itself was a great achievement. He's the real deal, well-versed in both the joys of victory and the humiliations of defeat. That said, in his case, there is a secret to his strength."

The recording of the match came to a close.

Sairaorg—that was, the House of Bael—had won.

In the end, the tough guy Zephyrdor retreated into the shadows in terror as he announced his surrender.

That huge strongman had been reduced to tears. Sairaorg, for his part, had nothing further to say and simply departed the battlefield.

"That punk guy is pathetic!" Had I not borne witness to Sairaorg's overwhelmingly intimidating aura, I might have laughed at Zephyrdor.

I sensed that victory was an obsession for Sairaorg. He was the kind of man who wouldn't compromise, no matter what the stakes.

It felt similar to Saji when he had come for me during our Rating Game... Sairaorg was willing to stake everything on his quest to fulfill his dreams.

Now that the video was over, silence settled over us.

"I'm going to let you know now. After your match with Diodora, your next one

is against Sairaorg,” revealed Azazel.

“Seriously?!” I couldn’t contain my shock.

Azazel, however, merely nodded.

“Isn’t that a little too soon?” the prez asked suspiciously. “I thought we would be facing Glasya-Labolas first?”

“He’s a lost cause.”

None of us knew how to respond to that.

“Zephyrdor was absolutely crushed in his last battle,” Azazel continued. “That encounter has left him petrified with fear. He can’t fight anymore. His spirit is broken. So the matches will continue with the remaining participants. The House of Glasya-Labolas won’t be proceeding any further.”

The most striking image from that recording, the one that stayed with me even now, was of Zephyrdor cowering in fear at the end.

That was the moment when his spirit shattered.

Perhaps that was what the prez had meant when she said Sairaorg might be even stronger than Riser. As immortal as the phoenix might be, he wouldn’t be able to keep on going if his mind were broken.

“You had all better be careful. He’ll come at you trying to crush your spirits, just like he does all his opponents. He’s serious about that mission of his, becoming a Demon King. He won’t compromise or hesitate, and he won’t give you any ground.”

Azazel’s warning sank deep into my heart.

We couldn’t afford to let down our guard even for a second! Still, I hadn’t gone through all that effort to unlock my Balance Breaker for nothing! I would put everything I had into working with the others to take down Sairaorg!

The prez took a deep breath. “Let’s focus on our next match first. We need to see how Astaroth fights to prepare our strategy. I heard he defeated Seekvaira Agares, the next in line to the Agares Archduchy.”

“Agares lost?!” I exclaimed.

That girl with the glasses whom Zephyrdor had confronted during the banquet had been defeated? She had seemed quite powerful, as had her servants...

And yet Diodora had bested her...

“Just as Sona’s performance against us was considered a remarkable feat, so, too, was Astaroth’s against Agares. Keep in mind that Agares was supposedly the second-most favored demon youth. When all is said and done, the rankings were no more than predictions, after all. No one can tell what’s going to happen once a match gets underway. That goes for any Rating Game,” the prez explained.

By the sound of it, we weren’t the only Familia having a rough time. I had realized this over the summer, but it felt all the truer now—anything could happen in a Rating Game.

“That said, I never would have expected Agares to lose,” Rias said under her breath as she began the next recording.

At that moment—

Flash!

A magic circle, one large enough only to transport a single person, appeared in a corner of the room!

Huh?! What’s going on? Is someone jumping here?

I didn’t recognize the pattern.

“...Astaroth,” Akeno murmured.

There was a momentary burst of light, and when it faded, that slender pretty boy was standing there wearing his usual innocent smile.

“Greetings. It is I, Diodora Astaroth. I’m here to see Asia.”

The prez and Diodora sat at a table, with Azazel joining them as an adviser.

Akeno had prepared a pot of tea and was standing by Rias’s side.

We, the remaining members of the prez’s Familia, watched from the corner of the clubroom. For some reason, this reminded me of when I’d first met Riser.

The atmosphere was practically identical, this sense of difference in status between me as a low-class demon and Rias and Diodora as high-class demons.

This time, however, it was Asia's future that was on the line, not the prez's. The person in question sat beside me, her expression clouded. I took her hand in my own, her nervousness reaching me through the silence.

The prez will clear up everything, Asia. So don't worry. I'll protect you no matter what.

If worst comes to worst and he won't listen, I'll use my Balance Breaker.

Still, it could turn into a serious incident if I took on another high-class demon. I had already caused the prez's engagement to be called off by doing that once before. But if I had to, I would do it all over again!

Diodora couldn't possibly have known the depths of my resolve. He fixed the prez with a gentle smile as he began. "Rias. I don't want to beat around the bush here, so I'll speak plainly. I want to trade Bishops with you."

Trading—a system by which two Kings could exchange Familia members, so long as they were of the same Evil Piece. I had heard about this from Ravel Phenex.

Bishops—in other words, Asia or Gasper!

"Yargh! Is he talking about me?!" Gasper cried, wrapping his arms around his body.

I slapped him on the head. "As if. Calm down."

My recluse underclassman had developed considerably during our stay in the underworld. When I first met him, he probably would have reacted much more hysterically. Something like, *Kyarghhhhh! I-is he talking about meeeee?!* And then he would no doubt have shut himself away in his cardboard box.

It was good to see him improving. Incidentally, he was making progress overcoming his aversion to garlic, too.

...In any event, Diodora was undoubtedly asking after Asia. The moment he said the word *Bishop*, Asia tightened her grip on my hand. She clearly didn't want to go.

“I’m asking, of course, after Asia Argento,” Diodora clarified without hesitation, turning his gaze our way. That smile of his was just too damn elegant.

Dammit! I was right! He was trying to steal Asia away from us! And not just that, Diodora wished to seize her forcefully by trade! That wasn’t how you married someone!

“In exchange, I would be willing—”

Diodora pulled out what looked like a document profiling his Familia members, but the prez raised a hand to stop him. “I thought as much. I’m sorry. You deserve to know this up front: I’m not interested in a trade. I mean no disrespect to your own Bishops, but I have no intention of letting Asia go. She’s an invaluable member of this Familia.”

She rejected him point-blank!

Whooooooooaaaaa! Prezzzzzz! I was moved!

There was no mistaking it! The reason she didn’t so much as look at the catalogue was because, in her mind, there could be no comparing Asia to anyone else! She didn’t even want to suggest that weighing Asia against another Bishop was a worthwhile endeavor!

“Is that because of her abilities? Or her individual charm?” Diodora asked calmly.

Th-that bastard! The answer is a resounding no! It’s time for him to pack up and go home!

The prez gave him the best possible answer: “Both. I think of her as a younger sister.”

“President!” Asia raised a hand to her mouth, her green eyes glistening with happiness.

She was undoubtedly overjoyed to hear that Rias saw her that way.

“She’s a precious friend and member of my household. I care deeply about her. Is that not reason enough? Besides, I don’t know how I feel about trying to acquire a marriage partner through an exchange. I can’t quite stomach being

party to something like that, Diodora. Do you understand how a marriage proposal is supposed to work?”

The prez flashed him a grin, but there was an unmistakable intensity behind it. Although clearly trying to act polite, she was obviously pissed!

Diodora’s smile never wavered. It gave me the creeps.

“Very well. I’ll leave you for now. But I haven’t given up.”

He rose to his feet and made his way toward us—toward Asia.

She was clearly uncomfortable, but that didn’t stop Diodora from dropping down to one knee and taking her hand in his own. “Asia. I love you. Fret not—fate shan’t betray us. Even if the whole world stands in our way, I shall overcome all obstacles to make my way to you.”

Not only did he spout all that crap, he raised Asia’s hand to his lips, about to kiss it—

Snap.

At that moment, something broke inside me.

Before I knew it, I had placed my hand on his shoulder, pulling him away.

Then, with that silver-laced smile of his, Diodora said, “Let go, would you? I can’t stand to be touched by a filthy dragon.”

Th-that bastard! How can he say that so innocently?! Is this his true nature?!

I nearly went ape on that pretty boy, but at that moment—

Slap!

Asia’s hand slammed hard into Diodora’s cheek. She wrapped her arms around me and all but shrieked, “Don’t say that!”

...I hadn’t expected her to strike him. But it was a welcome sight!

Diodora’s cheek turned red. Nonetheless, he still didn’t stop grinning. The unwavering expression made my hair stand on end...

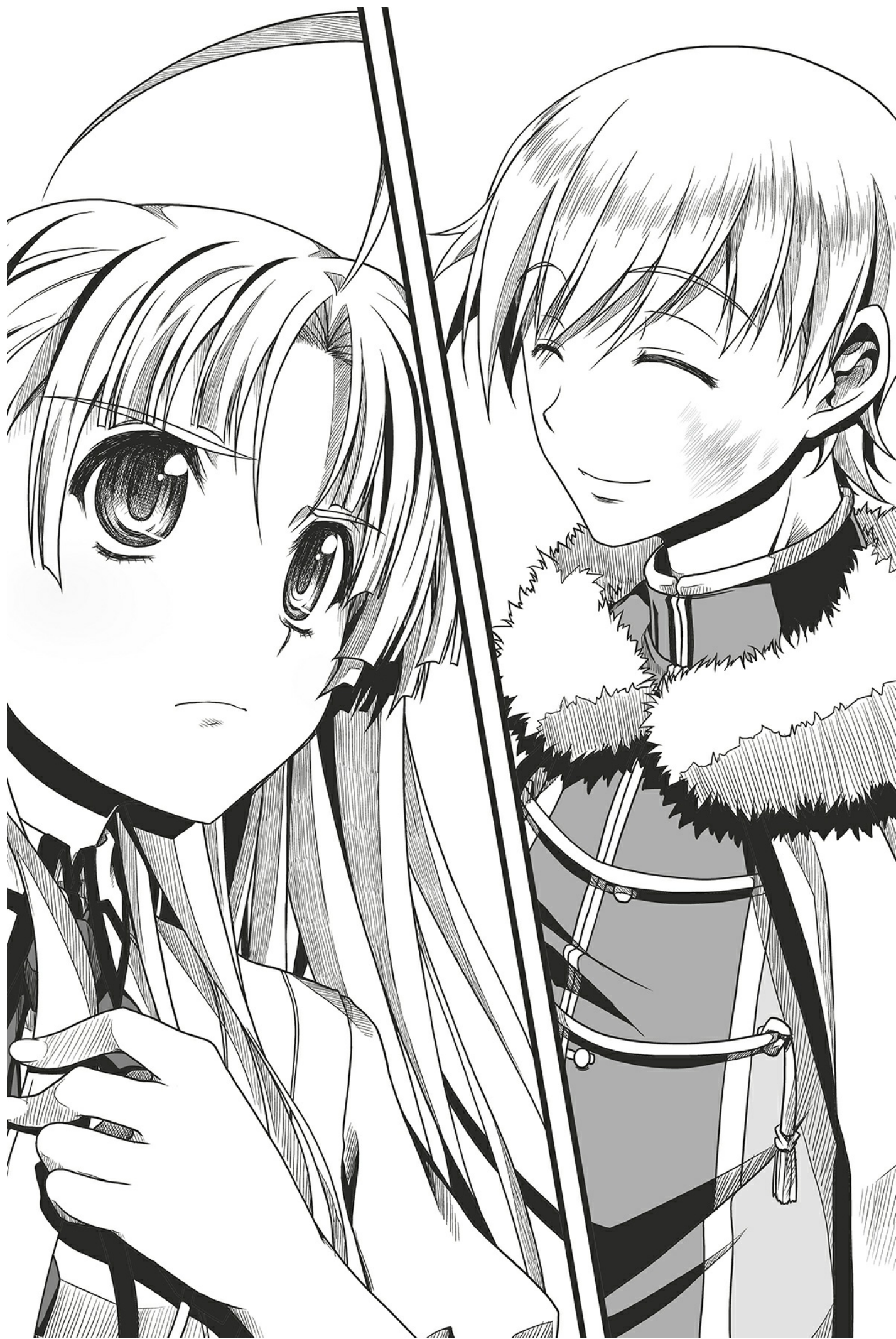
“I see. I understand... In that case, how does this sound? I shall defeat the Red Dragon Emperor, Issei Hyoudou, in our upcoming match. And then, Asia, you

will accept my love—”

“There’s no way I’m going to lose to the likes of you!” I declared right to his face.

None of this was for him to decide!

Still, if that was how he wanted to play, then it was fine. The situation was easy enough to understand. If I wanted him to go away, all I had to do was beat him.



“Red Dragon Emperor, Issei Hyoudou—I shall fell you during our next Rating Game.”

“Diodora Astaroth, I’ll give you a taste of the full power of this *filthy* dragon!”

Diodora and I exchanged glares. I couldn’t let him get his hands on Asia!

At that moment, Azazel’s phone began to ring. He exchanged a few brief words with whoever was on the other end of the line before turning to us. “Good timing. Rias, Diodora. The date for your match has been set. Five days from now.”

We called it a day there, and Diodora made his way home through his magic circle.

Don’t you dare show your face in this clubroom again!

With renewed determination, I set about getting ready for our match.

We received official confirmation of the venue and starting time from the Demon King several days later.



“A high-class demon...”

It was late at night, and I was busy doing the rounds of my demon work. Having finished with one client, I was cycling back to the school.

Thanks to my training in the underworld, I was now capable of leaping through magic circles. Nonetheless, my clients had gotten used to me arriving by bicycle and seemed disappointed whenever I used a magic circle to warp directly to them.

Because of that, I was still biking. All that effort learning how to properly use the magic circles hadn’t amounted to much.

Then again, my reputation as the so-called Cycling Demon could help to boost the number of clients requesting me specifically...

Not only that, all this riding around *did* make for good a workout... Over the past few months, I had perhaps become a little obsessed with training...

Anyway, as I pedaled my way back, I fell to thinking about high-class demons.

I had seen it firsthand down in the underworld, but they sure did tend to look down on their lower-ranked kin...

The prez and her parents were exceptions to that rule, but it clearly applied to Riser, Diodora, and most other high-class demons from old Houses. Near as I could figure, reincarnated or lower-ranked demons were basically trash to them.

It was completely unfair! But I wondered if their reason for mistreating us was more complex. Maybe those demons, with their long, vaunted histories, were afraid of us newcomers throwing our weight around? That would make sense, but to be honest, I had no way of being certain.

After all, I was just a low-ranked reincarnated demon, desperately fighting to be acknowledged.

“Phew. Who could have guessed that sports drinks could be so good?”

I stopped for a quick break in front of a vending machine, when—

Out of nowhere, I sensed a presence behind me!

Who is it?!

The figure that appeared out of the darkness...was a casually dressed guy! What’s more, I recognized him!

“Hiya, Red Dragon Emperor.”

“Bikou! What are you doing here?!”

Yep, it was none other than that smiley-faced descendant of Sun Wukong! This time, however, he wasn’t wearing his Chinese-style armor but the sort of everyday clothes common among fashion-conscious young people. His outfit wasn’t important, though. Why was he here?!

“I’m just accompanying my partner,” he explained, glancing over his shoulder.

It can’t be!

A few paces behind him was...

“I haven’t seen you for a whole two months, Issei Hyoudou.”

It was Vali, wearing a white T-shirt and casual pants!

“Vali!”

I immediately raised my guard, readying myself for the worst!

This was bad! What did they want with me?!

“They say you’ve attained your full Balance Breaker? I’m glad to hear it.”

That overconfident grin of Vali’s really got on my nerves. Even now, he was looking down on me.

“Yo, Mr. Wise Old White Dragon Emperor. Do you want to pick up where we left off or something?” I demanded, preparing to activate my Boosted Gear.

Vali, however, broke out into a chuckle. “You’re feeling aggressive today, aren’t you, Issei Hyoudou?”

“It can’t be helped. You’re standing in the way of my future plans.”

“To become a high-class demon, right? I wouldn’t worry about that. You’re well on track to get there in a few years’ time.”

Had the White Dragon Emperor just complimented me? All the same, I doubted it would be so easy. I was putting my all into that dream.

“That isn’t what I came here to say, however,” Vali admitted.

“Then what *do* you want?” I pressed.

“I heard about your upcoming Rating Game. The one against the next heir to the House of Astaroth.”

How did he know that? I guess he had his sources. Vali *did* belong to a special team in a well-outfitted terrorist organization. They undoubtedly had a considerable information network...

“What about it?”

“You should watch your back.”

Suspicious, but still not lowering my guard, I asked, “...What do you mean?”

Vali merely shrugged. “You saw the recording of his other match, right? Against the archduke’s dear little princess?”

Indeed, after Diodora had left, we had all sat down to watch the recorded

footage of his match against the Agares girl.

Diodora had won it single-handedly... His power had been so overwhelming that his Familia members were only there for support.

As a Wizard-type, he employed a wide assortment of different powers—stronger even than the prez's—and had used them to crush the Power-type Seekvaira Agares.

We all doubted our eyes when we saw that. I didn't pay attention to the match so much as to Diodora himself. Seekvaira seemed to have had the advantage at first, right before her opponent suddenly powered up. Had Diodora concealed his true abilities up until the last minute?

Azazel had apparently watched the match live, but even he was skeptical of Diodora's incredible increase in strength. It was completely at odds with the data Azazel had received beforehand.

The prez had been equally astounded.

"Diodora has never been that powerful," she remarked.

Both she and Azazel had been in agreement on that point.

That wasn't to suggest Diodora was weak—his recorded high-class demon powers placed only a little below Rias's. However, his display during the Rating Game left us all totally shaken.

How could he have improved so much in such a short period of time?

And the match had ended midway through with a confrontation between the two Kings. Did all the demon youths whom we had met in the underworld have a poor grip on basic strategy or something? Why were they all obsessed with charging headlong into the thick of it?

From what I gathered, the big-name spectators relished this fresh approach to the Rating Game, duels between Kings especially...

"Well, your high-class demon friends probably wouldn't believe it coming from me, but I thought you might hear me out," said Vali.

...Was I supposed to feel grateful or something? I didn't quite know how to respond.

At that moment, a shadow appeared down the road.

Vali and Bikou must have sensed it approaching, too, as they glanced in the shape's direction.

Who now?!

Emerging out of the night—was a macho hunk dressed in a gothic Lolita outfit...! And he had cat ears on his head!

Mil?!

He was one of my regular clients! Was he just passing by?! Him seeing me while I was out on work suggested the involvement of some unknown driving force!

The moment that he appeared, Vali blinked in surprise.

I, too, doubted my eyes.

"Meow," Mil said, raising his hand in greeting as he strolled past.

"Those cat ears...is he the *nekomata*? I couldn't sense him approaching at all. Sage magic?" Vali asked Bikou, his expression stern.

As if!

Had Vali been anyone else, I would have roasted him with some clever words!

"No, that's... Is it some kind of troll...? A cat troll...?" Bikou tilted his head in confusion.

I had no idea how to respond to this!

Nonetheless, thanks to Mil's appearance, the tension that had fallen over us was suddenly released. Even Vali didn't seem as eager to engage in combat.

Thank you, Mil!

"Okay, then... Let's get going, Bikou." With that, the White Dragon Emperor and his companion turned to leave.

"Hold on! You came all this way just to give me a warning?" I demanded.

Vali let out a chuckle. "I was in the area, so I thought I might as well offer my future rival a bit of friendly advice."

“See ya, Red Dragon Emperor! Hey, Vali, let’s stop by that ramen restaurant before we go!”

With that, the two of them disappeared back into the depths of night.

Argh! I just didn’t get it! What was the point of showing up so relaxed like that after all the trouble he had caused us?! Vali was acting as if he was just out for a stroll!

“Your rival is a strange one,” Ddraig said.

Yep! My thoughts exactly! I thought back.

“Then again, you aren’t exactly a paragon of normality, either.”

How rude.

“Still, I’m enjoying this.”

Huh? Where did that come from?

“It feels like out of all my past hosts, you’re the one I can speak most freely with. You’re my first host who actually makes for entertaining conversation.”

That’s because I’m so clueless and need your help all the time.

“...That might not be such a bad thing. You treat me as a fellow being, not a tool.”

Hold on, Ddraig was a living being, wasn’t he?! Now it was my turn to be jolted with shock!

You are the Red Dragon Emperor, right? D-did I misunderstand something?

“Bwa-ha-ha. Yep, you’re a strange one all right.”

No matter what I did, I couldn’t understand these Heavenly Dragons one little bit.



“So Vali showed up...”

After returning to the clubroom, I asked the prez to hang back after we wrapped up the day’s demon business, and I explained what had happened.

She rested her chin on her hand, sinking deep into thought. “...We should

have sensed him if he entered the town... Yet I didn't notice him at all. How did he manage to conceal his presence so well? Sage magic? Or one of Kuroka's spatial barriers, maybe?"

She paused there, activating a small magic circle for communication. "In any event, I'll let my brother and Azazel know, just in case."

After submitting her report, the prez flashed me a warm smile. "We should be on alert about Diodora, too. I don't know how much stock I can put into Vali's warning, but we should nonetheless remain vigilant. Now then, shall we go home?"

"Sure."

And like that, the two of us set off.

I pedaled my bicycle, with Rias sitting behind me. She wrapped her arms around my waist, which caused her breasts to push up against my back. They felt awesome!

Everyone else was probably already relaxing. Apart from Kiba and Gasper, all the other club members had moved into my family's house. Those two were apparently living in an apartment nearby. Gasper had finally worked up the courage to step outside the old school building. He was growing up so fast.

Supposedly, he and Kiba were just around the corner so that they could stop by whenever needed.

When we arrived home, the prez went straight to my room. The moment she opened the door—

"Oh dear, Issei. Welcome home."

Akeno was waiting in a sexy cosplay outfit!

"A-Akeno! What are you wearing?!"

It was a shrine maiden outfit, one clearly modeled on the appearance of a character from a famous video game. It almost completely revealed her thighs and breasts, covering only the bare minimum!

I couldn't avert my gaze. It was awesome! She was so sexy! How provocative, Akeno! If she were to spin around too quickly, her chest might end up falling

right out into plain sight! There was clearly no way she could have been wearing underwear beneath something like that!

Akeno flashed me a mischievous smile. “Oh-ho-ho. Do you remember what I said to you the other day? That I would dress up for you...? Do you like it?”

Ah! Right, Akeno had mentioned something like that when she had found me in the bookstore before our match against Chairwoman Sona! I had completely forgotten about it, but she hadn’t!

“O-of course! It’s awesome!”

I was utterly smitten. My voice rang with joy. There was no greater elation than this!

“Thank goodness. Oh-ho-ho. What shall we do? How about an appreciation party? Or maybe...” Akeno traced a finger across her chest, glancing suggestively my way. “Perhaps we could have a trial session in bed, touching allowed.”

Gah!

Blood shot from my nose as I envisioned what she meant.

Obviously, I was up for that! I would have said as much, but my whole body froze in response to the frigid, murderous aura welling up behind me.

I glanced over my shoulder, only to find the prez staring at Akeno with a terrifying smile.

“...Akeno? What are you doing here?”

“Oh, Rias. There you are.” That response was clearly contrived.

At home, Akeno typically addressed the prez by her name. At school or during the course of our demon work, it was always “President.”

“Of course I’m here. Issei and I share this room,” Rias replied, trembling.

“I see. Well, wait outside for a little while, then. I’m here to please Issei, and you’ll just get in the way.”

The prez went motionless at those words, her voice shaking. “...Get in the... way...?”

Whoaaaaa! A murderous crimson energy surrounded her! This was bad! They were going to get caught up in another fight!

I could sense oncoming danger, but at that moment, three adorable figures appeared in a corner of the room—Asia, Xenovia, and Koneko!

Hold on, why are they wearing sexy outfits, too?!

The designs were slightly different, but Asia and Xenovia were sporting shrine maiden outfits similar to Akeno's! And of course, that meant they were showing an incredible amount of skin!

Whoa... Asia's thighs were almost completely bare. She had great legs! As the closest thing to a brother to her, I was conflicted! Those slim legs and her gorgeous white skin set my heart on fire!

"Yep, it sure is easy to move in this. It isn't really compatible with underwear, but functionally speaking, I've got no complaints," Xenovia remarked.

Was she considering that getup entirely from a warrior's perspective?! And she had nothing on underneath it?!

"B-but without a bra...y-you can see right through it..." Asia blushed, covering her chest.

Upon careful inspection, I could make out two delicious pink circles.

No! I scolded myself. No matter how beautiful they were, I couldn't stare at them like that!

I heard footsteps from my other side. It was Koneko sneaking up on me while I was distracted, and she was clad in an animal costume!

She was showing much less skin than the others, but her cat ears and swaying tail were beyond lovely!

"...Does it suit me-ow?"

That beckoning cat pose she struck at the end of her sentence pushed Koneko's destructive power to new heights! She was so cute! This petite girl was adorable!

Are all our female club members cosplayers?! Is this a dream come true?!

“...I’ll get changed as well!” The teary-eyed prez, not wanting to be left out, sifted through a pile of outfits at the far end of the room!

All of a sudden, this had practically become some kind of dress-up tournament.

“Wh-what’s going on?” I asked Akeno.

“Well, when I told the others I wanted to fulfill my promise to you, they said they wanted to join in. And so, here we are.”

Evidently, the others had joined of curiosity. Still, they all were blessed with wonderful figures and superb senses of style!

Hmm, maybe I should try to take some photos later? I could use them to fuel my late-night indulgences!

Click!

The changing room door swung open, and out came the prez in an erotic demon costume! Her black bat-like wings fluttered back and forth so temptingly!

“See, Issei? It looks so much better on me, don’t you think? No one knows your tastes better than I do.” She struck a victorious pose, her breasts quivering seductively!

“Yep! I love it!”

The prez sure had a strong sense of rivalry with Akeno.

“...”

Without saying anything, Akeno made her way into the changing room. When she came out, she was wearing practically nothing more than a string!

Gah! My nosebleed wouldn’t stop! She was almost completely naked! A-all it took was the slightest movement and I could see her nipples!

“Issei, you like revealing outfits like this best, no?”

I nodded forcefully, with absolute relish.

It was amazing... Something incredible was unfolding right in front of my eyes!

“Issei. Raise a finger into the air for me,” Akeno requested.

Confused, I did as instructed. Akeno immediately grabbed ahold of my hand and pulled it toward her breast!

Wha—?! It was so soft!

My finger sank right into that glorious tit!

Bah! The blood trickling from my nose was building up into a torrent!

An unbelievable suppleness, softer and more elastic than the most sumptuous of marshmallows!

“Ngh... Th-this is amazing... Your finger, Issei... When I saw you face down Diodora, my heart melted for you... You’re so strong and manly... I can’t hold back any longer...,” Akeno breathed, her gasps electric.

A surge coursed through my flesh! She was just too damn sexy!

Akenooooo!

This was bad! At this rate, I would reach my Balance Breaker all over again! I could feel it coming! I sure had been doing a lot of groping lately!

“...”

The prez took my left hand in her own! And then she placed it on her own breast!

Plop!

My palm wrapped around that soft flesh! I was touching the breasts of the Two Great Ladies at the same time!

Whoaaaaa!

“...Ah... Just as I thought, when you touch me...my heart races so... Why does it feel so good...? The more you caress me, Issei...the better it is... I could cry out in ecstasy... Ah...”

The blood pouring from my nose swelled to a flood in response to those seductive sounds! I would end up dying of blood loss at this rate!

But I would never grow tired of the prez’s breasts, no matter how many times

I touched them! Her silky skin was smooth and elastic, the softest and most delightful texture I had ever known! They were too big for me to fully grasp in my hands, a perfectly overwhelming size! When I tightened my fingers around them, a frightening sense of excitement coursed through me!

This was it! Yep, I was about to reach my Balance Breaker again, about to unleash yet another new power!

Before I knew it, my right hand, merely poking Akeno's breast a moment ago, was now fondling it tightly! I focused the entirety of my attention onto the palms of my hands, relishing that unbreakable pudding-like feeling! They were clinging to my skin! This fresh, juicy tension was practically a flesh-and-blood embodiment of the concept of woman!

Experiencing them as I was, I could feel the differences between Rias's and Akeno's chests!

Are Akeno's slightly softer, perhaps? Hmm, but the prez's are much springier!

As I felt them up, the girls exchanged baleful glares, all but sending sparks flying across the room!

Then the prez, her eyes moist, charged toward the changing room. "I won't lose to *you*, Akeno!"

N-not a moment later, Akeno ran after her. "No, I can definitely proposition Issei better than you can!"

"He said that *I'm* enthralling!"

"Do you expect me to believe that?! The other day, he admitted that *my* body felt amazing!"

"You probably forced him to say that, right?! And when did you start addressing him so casually?!"

"There's no harm in it! I'll call him whatever I like. Issei, Issei, Issei, Issei, Issei! You're a pain, Rias!"

"And you're a dull clod, Akeno! I'll never forgive you for this!"

The Two Great Ladies started quarreling even louder in the changing room! I couldn't tell whether this was a sign of deep friendship or not...

In the end, I could only conclude that they did in fact get along remarkably well.

“...Issei. A tissue. Your nose is bleeding.”

Thank you, Koneko. Uh-oh. I really have lost a lot of blood...

“This won’t do. There’s no stopping the two of them once they start bickering like this... Let’s go, Asia.”

“O-okay!”

Asia and Xenovia took me by my hands and guided me—dizzy with blood loss—to the room next door.

All the while, the prez and Akeno kept shouting over each other while changing.

“The match is in five days. So soon,” Xenovia said as she moved her piece across the board.

In the room next to my own, she, Asia, Koneko, and I were playing the demon edition of the Game of Life.

Each player started as a low-ranked demon, progressing through the intermediate and upper ranks, eventually climbing all the way up to being a high-class demon, while the winner took the crown as a Demon King. In the real-life underworld, it wasn’t so easy to get promoted, but the game nonetheless seemed to be as popular down there as it was in the human realm.

We were sitting around the table, and I had Koneko on my lap. I kept getting distracted by the warm touch of her bottom pressing against me, but I had to restrain myself.

After touching Xenovia’s, Asia’s, Rias’s, and Akeno’s breasts today, I felt as if my brain was melting... I would be able to power myself all night long with those sensations that still lingered on the palms of my hands.

Ah, if I had a lover, perhaps I’d be able to do that kind of thing twenty-four seven...

I wanted nothing more than to build my harem as quickly as possible and to throw myself into a world of tits!

Unfortunately, I must have been anemic, as unshakable dizziness and hazy consciousness gripped me. Between my private life and my battles, wasn't I shedding a little too much blood? This was going to be a problem...

“—!”

“—!”

Rias's and Akeno's voices sounded through the wall. They did sometimes go a little overboard.

At first, I had blamed myself for what had happened, but Koneko gave me a word of advice. “...When they get like that, you're better off just letting them fight it out. There's no point trying to stop them.”

As such, I had let them be. Hopefully they weren't battling with magic in there.

Ever since we had come back from the underworld, Koneko had made a habit of offering me a great many tidbits of advice.

According to her, I needed to get a better understanding of young women.

A woman's heart... If I could understand that, would I become more popular with girls? *What I would do to be a little more popular...*

All of a sudden, someone knocked at the door. It was Irina.

“Wow. I just got home, and what would you know? Rias and Akeno were having a huge fight. What a shock! Ah! Is that the Game of Life? Can I play?!”

Irina had apparently been handling some errands at a distant church (not the one formerly used by the fallen angels), but she was eager to dive right into the board game.

“Is this a demon version? Wow, cool! Maybe even I, a reincarnated angel, can get an idea of what it's like to be a demon!”

As far as I could tell, she seemed to enjoy just about everything.

“Hee.”

Asia let out a small laugh.

“Hmm? What is it, Asia?” I asked.

She flashed me a grin. “I was just thinking about how fun this is.”

“Ah, me too. But where did that come from?”

“Issei, I love my life. And I love you all, too.”

“I know. Don’t worry about the next Rating Game. We just need to keep doing the same thing we have been,” I assured, trying to encourage her.

Xenovia nodded. “That’s right, Asia. We’re friends. Anyone who tries to hurt you will taste my sword.”

She was almost *overly* dependable. This was her way of trying to cheer up Asia.

“Asia, let’s finish the game and take first place in the three-legged race at the Sports Festival!” I said.

“Right!” she answered with a broad smile.

Yep. I—no, *we*—would protect Asia! We wouldn’t let Diodora have her!

Suddenly, the door swung open, and the prez stepped in. She was wearing a bunny outfit. Had she and Akeno finished their costume combat? I could feel my nose bleeding again...

“Sorry for barging in.”

“...?”

Everyone stared back at the prez blankly.

“I have news. We’re going to be interviewed for a TV show in the underworld—a special feature on high-class demon youths.”

“...”

Each of us, myself included, was dumbfounded.

“A TV show?!” echoed a cry through the Hyoudou residence!

[Asia](#)

I—Asia Argento—was taken aback.

We were going to be on television. It felt like every single day living with Issei

brought yet more surprises.

Several months had passed since I had begun living in his house. Thanks to Issei and the others, I attended school and made friends with Kiryuu, Matsuda, Motohama, and everyone else in the class.

The president, Akeno, Kiba, Koneko, and Gasper were all incredibly kind to me. Xenovia was the same age as me, and we had become best friends. Irina was a good friend, too.

Issei's father and mother were welcoming and generous, and life in Japan was filled with fresh new things to see and experience. I had even gone to the underworld for my summer vacation.

My life was bursting with tons of colors that I would never have even imagined back when I was a member of the Church.

And then there was Diodora's proposal... It practically had me quaking! No one had ever proposed to me before. I'd had no idea how to respond.

However, Issei assured me that he would always be by my side. That was all I needed. If I had him, I was content.

I was happy to spend my time with Issei, laughing, having fun...

Lord, please let me stay with Issei forever. Let me be with him until the end of time. A-and if I could ask one more thing... I-if you can, please let my next proposal be from him... I know that it's selfish of me. But I love him, and I want to dream a little. Just thinking about him fills me with joy. Lord, please watch over me and the man I love.

Boss×Boss

"Sorry about bringing this to you over the phone, Sirzechs. It's about the suspicious death of the last heir to the House of Glasya-Labolas and the astonishing growth of Diodora Astaroth's powers..."

"So I was right, they are related. It looks like we demons still have some issues to sort out."

"I don't have any concrete evidence yet, but if we take Vali's warning at face

value, then Diodora... I'm thinking we've got no choice but to enact the plan we discussed earlier... Sorry if I seem a bit down. Someone close to me has just had an important event."

"I've heard. It sounds like one of the leaders of the Grigori has gotten married."

"...Everyone's always rushing into things. Worse, he was sleeping with a woman from another faction behind my back... Dammit, am I the only single guy left?!"

"Ha-ha-ha. Why don't you settle down, too, Azazel?"

"No way. I live for my passions... A-and there are plenty of women out there!"

"Indeed. Well, let's start taking the necessary steps. I trust your plan."

"Right. Leave it to me. Although we *will* be putting them through another round of trouble..."

Life.3

The Great Battle!

“Ah, er, I—I’m... Yes, I belong to the Gremory Familia...”

I was sitting in front of the mirror in my room, practicing my public speaking and smiling. I wanted everyone to think of me wearing a cheerful grin, but all this rehearsing only got me feeling more nervous.

I mean, I was going to be on TV! Naturally, I wanted to leave a good impression!

That night, the prez had received a call from Grayfia about the underworld television station offering us an appearance on their program—and the offer extended to every member of the Gremory Familia!

The Rating Games between the up-and-coming demon youths had been broadcast throughout the underworld—ours included. The prez was already famous as the sister of a Demon King, and our performance during the match had increased her renown even more.

I had heard that a certain underworld magazine even ran a Rias Gremory special edition!

Over the summer, I had realized how widely adored she was, and it seemed like that popularity was only on the increase.

Apparently, clothes resembling the uniform of Kuou Academy were even setting the fashion scene for demon girls. It wouldn’t be long before they dressed the same as their human counterparts.



Squish!

Someone grabbed ahold of me from behind! I knew the feeling of these breasts pressing against my back! Just as I suspected, I saw the prez was staring into my eyes from the mirror.

“What are you doing, Issei?” she asked playfully.

“W-well, I’m getting ready for our TV appearance.”

“Heh-heh. Don’t worry about it. All you need to do is answer normally. Most of the questions will be directed at me anyway.”

She began to pat me on the head to release my tension! Ah, Prez! My doting, sisterlike Prez! How could I ever fault the way she cared for her servants?

“You know, Issei, you don’t need to shoulder all that responsibility for Asia yourself,” she said gently. “Lately, you’ve been thinking about Diodora more than she has. Of course, I’m concerned about him, too, but you look to me like you’re extremely worried about Asia. Do you blame yourself for bringing her into our world?”

...The prez was incredible. I nodded, staring down at my feet. “...Yes. But she said that she’s happy with the way things are now. And I do think it’s all worked out for the best... But still, I—”

Squeeze.

The prez caught me in a gentle embrace and whispered into my ear, “We’ll make her happy, Issei. You, me, and everyone else in this Familia. You and the others all need to strive for happiness, too, okay? Otherwise, you’ll make *me* sad.”

“...Prez...”

Her words brought tears to my eyes! Ugh! She was just so kind and caring!

This woman whom I loved really was the best! I would follow her anywhere!

She was right! She, I, and every other member of this Familia would all support Asia! We would spend our days laughing together! And we would be happy!

“Prez, I’ll do my best to look after everyone, myself included!”

Rias’s smile deepened at the sight of my determination. “Yes, I know you will. My dear Issei.”



Before I knew it, the day of the television interview was upon us.

We members of Rias Gremory’s Familia made our way to the underworld through our magic circle!

I hadn’t expected that I would be back so soon—it had only been a few days since the end of our summer vacation, after all.

We found ourselves in the basement of what looked like a large city building, in an area set aside for arrivals via warping. We were soon pleasantly welcomed by a number of staffers waiting there for us.

“Thank you for coming, Lady Rias Gremory. And you, her Familia members. Please, right this way.” One of those people, a producer, led us into a waiting elevator.

Generally, the building wasn’t all that dissimilar to what could be found in the human realm, but there *were* subtle differences—unfamiliar devices and equipment that looked to be powered by demon energy, and the like.

There was also a poster in the corridor of the prez! With her crimson hair, her exuberant grin, and her gorgeous appearance, she looked just like an idol!

At that moment, a familiar figure appeared at the far end of the corridor, followed by close to a dozen other faces.

“Sairaorg. You’re here, too, I see.”

Yep, it was none other than the prez’s cousin, the next head of the House of Bael.

He was wearing an aristocratic jacket over his shoulders, but his appearance was as wild as I remembered. With my amateur eyes, I couldn’t spot a single opening in his stance or bearing. Was he always ready for battle?

The blond pony-tailed young woman behind him must have been his Queen. She was a real beauty...

“Rias? Are you doing an interview as well?”

“Indeed. I take it that you’ve finished?”

“Not yet. We’re about to start now. I’m guessing we’re in different studios. I watched your match, by the way.”

The prez’s brow furrowed slightly.

“We’re both quite new at this, aren’t we? It might take us a while to get the hang of it.” Sairaorg flashed her a forced smile. Was he trying to offer some encouragement?

He shifted his gaze in my direction. “No matter how powerful you may be, if you keep repeating the same old tricks, you’re bound to lose. Your opponents will take full advantage of any openings. Don’t forget, there are a lot of unknowns when it comes to Sacred Gears. There’s no telling what they might do or how they could interact. Compatibility is crucial. I learned a great deal from your match with Sona Sitri. That said...” He paused there, patting me on the shoulder. “I look forward to facing your extraordinary power myself.”

—.

With those final words, he departed down the corridor.

...He had only clapped it lightly, but my shoulder felt strangely heavy.

Did the number one demon youth harbor special expectations for me? How nerve-racking!

After exchanging greetings with Sairaorg, we made our way to our dressing room, where we set up our belongings.

Azazel was apparently making an appearance on another program, so he hadn’t joined us. Irina was staying at home, too.

Which meant that today was all about the Gremory Familia.

Next, we were taken to what looked like a studio. The staff were busy at work, the preparations not yet complete.

The woman who would be interviewing us was waiting, and she came to greet the prez. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Lady Gremory. I’m the presenter here at

Underworld TV One.”

“The pleasure is mine,” Rias responded with a grin, shaking the older woman’s hand.

“Now, as for the questions—”

With that, the prez, the staff, and the presenter started talking business.

My eye wandered, and I noticed a lot of tiered seats beyond the stage. A studio audience! Whoa... Not only was this interview going to be live, there would be a crowd watching in the room, too...

Damn, I was so nervous! Even if the interview *was* mainly about the prez, all her Familia members would be expected to say at least a few words...

“...I—I—I... I want to go hooooome!” Gasper wailed behind my back.

It was a cruel twist of fate that had forced this sociophobic shut-in to appear on TV.

You aren’t the only one anxious about this, Gasper. Be strong.

“Each of you will field a few questions, but please try to relax,” one of the staff members called out to us. “Um, are Yuuto Kiba and Akeno Himejima here?”

“Ah, that’s me. I’m Yuuto Kiba.”

“And I’m Akeno Himejima.”

The two of them raised their hands.

“You two should expect more questions than the others. You’re both particularly popular.”

“Seriously?!” I cried in shock.

The TV station worker nodded. “Yes. Kiba is particularly popular among our female viewers, just as Akeno is among our male watchers.”

I guess that did make sense. A handsome pretty boy and a breathtaking beauty.

The battle against Sona Sitri and her Familia must have really put them on the

map. Mentally, I cursed Kiba. Some guys had all the luck! As for how I thought about Akeno...that was complicated. She was one of my dear Two Great Ladies, after all...

I stood there, unsure whether to rejoice or not. Perhaps noticing, Akeno flashed me a grin. “Don’t worry, Issei. I only have eyes for you. I won’t leave your side.” With that, she took my hand in her own.

Whoaaaaa! Akeno! I was moved by the depths of her affections for her fellow Familia members!

Huh?! I could feel a piercing gaze boring into my back. I glanced around—only to find the prez glaring at Akeno! She was sure keeping a strict eye on her servants!

“Er, lastly, Issei Hyoudou?”

“Th-that’s me.”

Was I popular, too? Truth be told, I kind of expected that!

The staffer shook her head, however.

“...Oh, that’s you...?”

She doesn’t recognize me?! Whaaaaat?!

“I’m Issei Hyoudou. The Pawn. The Red Dragon Emperor...,” I began to explain uncertainly.

Only then did the TV station worker seem to recognize me. “Ah! It *is* you! I didn’t identify you without your armor. It leaves such a strong impression, you see.”

It sure did! I had been armored for most of the last match, short though it had been!

I suppose it made sense that I didn’t leave as much of an impression in my normal state.

“Hyoudou, we’ll be holding your interview in a separate studio. The *Breast Dragon Emperor* is particularly famous, after all.”

“The *Breast Dragon Emperor*?!”

What the heck was that?! I gaped in shock at this new nickname I'd been branded with!

"You're quite popular among young children," the staff member explained. "They've started calling you the Breast Dragon. You did keep talking about women's chests during your match, right? That gag has become a big hit here in the underworld."

Seriously?! A gag?! For kids?! What gives?!

Still, *Breast Dragon*... I suppose I had gone on about boobs for a while during the match...

And of course, kids did tend to latch on to simple phrases like that. I guess whether you were in the human realm or the underworld, children weren't much different.

"Bah... Why...?" I could hear Ddraig sobbing inside me.

Hey, hey, hey, come on now, what's wrong?

"I, one of the Two Heavenly Dragons...the Red Dragon Emperor...a being of fear and legend..."

He was seriously bawling his eyes out in there... His new reputation must have come as an unpleasant shock.

Hmm, Breast Dragon Emperor... I could get used to that...

"Hyoudou, please follow me. I'll show you to your studio." With that, the TV station worker handed me a special script as they showed me to another room.

In my mind, I did my best to encourage Ddraig.

Now then, what was waiting for me next?

"If that wasn't nerve-racking..."

After the recording, the other club members and I were catching our collective breath in the dressing room.

It was clear that everyone was anxious over how the interview had gone. No sooner did they enter the room than they leaned against one of the walls or slumped down against the table.

From beginning to end, the show focused on several questions directed at the prez. What did she think of her battle against Sona Sitri? What were her plans from here? Which of the demon youths was she keeping an eye on? That kind of thing.

Rias had answered each and every one of them without hesitation, never forgetting to maintain her noble demeanor and friendly smile.

After all, her family could be watching, so we couldn't afford to do anything out of the ordinary. As the next head of the House of Gremory, she gave an incredibly cool and levelheaded interview!

When the interviewer moved on to Kiba, there was a volley of shrill cries from the audience. His popularity with the ladies really was off the charts. And when Akeno's turn rolled around, her male fans started crying out her name in excitement.

During my segment, many kids shouted, "Breast Emperor!" It was an indescribable feeling. I would never have expected to be so popular with children...

When I equipped my amor, I must have looked like a costumed cartoon character to them. That said, the fact that I kept on talking about boobs had sparked interest in me for an altogether different reason.

Ha-ha-ha, I guess that was why they did my portion in a different studio.

"By the way, Issei, what did you film?" the prez inquired as she nibbled on a sweet. "I'm sure they didn't whisk you off to a separate room for nothing."

"It's a secret. The staff asked me to not to tell anyone, not even my friends or family, until it airs," I answered with a mischievous chuckle.

"Okay. I'll look forward to watching it, then." Rias seemed to find that prospect exciting.

We were preparing to leave when there was a knock on the door to the dressing room.

Ah, what a cutie, I thought for a brief moment. A beautiful young woman entered. Her hair was done up in ringlets that trailed down to her shoulders.

Something about her seemed familiar...

“Is Master Issei here?” she asked.

“Ravel Phenex... What are you doing here?”

Our eyes met. For a second, it looked like Ravel’s face lit up, but then a sullen expression suddenly fell over her.

She hastily thrust a basket into my hands.

“Th-this! A cake! My brother—not Riser—has a program here, so I thought I’d drop by!”

I didn’t quite know how to respond, but I accepted the basket and looked over its contents.

There was indeed a delicious-looking cake inside. Masterfully baked, actually.

Still, why was Ravel acting so bashful about giving it to me? She ought to have been proud of her work.

“Did you make this?” I asked.

“Y-yes! Of course I did! I know how to bake at least! A-and I did promise to make one for you!”

“Thank you. But you could have waited until we had tea together. I thought that was the plan.”

“I—I’m not that tactless. You have a big battle coming up, don’t you? I don’t want to take up too much of your time. But I thought I could give you a cake, at least. You should be grateful!”

Hmm. I couldn’t tell whether she was being forceful or modest here...

In any event, I was touched that Ravel had gone through all this trouble for me.

“Th-then I’ll leave you to it.” She spun around, her business evidently concluded.

“Stop! Wait! Kiba?”

At my urging, Kiba summoned up a small cake knife.

I cut a thin slice and lifted it up to my lips.

A sweet chocolate flavor flooded my mouth. There was a hint of bitterness, as well, but it wasn't overbearing. Instead, it served to enhance the taste of the cake. It was perfectly soft and spongy, too.

"This is delicious, Ravel. Thank you. I'll eat the rest at home. Ha-ha-ha... I don't know when I'll see you next, so I thought I'd let you know what I thought before you left. We'll definitely have tea together next time. If it's okay with you, of course."

At this, Ravel's eyes glistened, her cheeks flushing red.

Huh? I would have expected her to come out with some overconfident retort, something like: *Of course it is! Oh-ho-ho!* But instead— "...Master Issei, I'll be rooting for you in your next match!"

With that, she gave us all a swift bow and quickly bolted from the room.

I glanced across at the prez.

Her eyes were closed, her brow knitted. The other female club members were glaring at me menacingly.

Wh-what...? Why are they so angry?

And so, our interview was over. The next big event on our agenda was our battle with Diodora.

A video from the TV station was delivered to my house shortly after that day at the TV station. When I checked to see what it was, I couldn't hide my shock!

...I—I had had no idea this would happen... How am I gonna explain this?

—○●○—

"Phew..."

I was standing in the changing room next to the large bathhouse in the new first basement floor of my house, sipping on a glass of fruit-flavored milk.

Ahhh, it was delicious! I rested my free hand on my hip and swallowed it all down in a single go!

Even after taking a wash, I still couldn't believe that such an extravagant

bathhouse had been installed in my family home. The Hyoudou residence had been completely renovated over summer break and was now six stories tall, with another three underground floors. There was even a full-sized pool in the second basement. The girls seemed to be using it fairly regularly. Really, this house was luxurious.

Thanks to this remodeling, there was ample space for all of our Familia members to live together. My parents seemed happy at the changes, too, so I guess it was all okay.

The bathhouse on the first basement floor had a fully stocked fridge containing all kinds of milk drinks.

According to the prez, drinking milk after a relaxing bath was a must in Japan.

She may well have been right about that. Her obsession with all things and practices Japanese was extraordinary at times.

Incidentally, I had decided to try a different drink every day. The prez was a fan of fruit-flavored milk, while Akeno, Asia, and Koneko preferred the plain variety. Xenovia enjoyed the coffee-flavored one.

My long soak after all that practice for our upcoming match had left me feeling wonderfully refreshed. Lately, I had to wonder if I'd become obsessed with physical training. Restlessness settled over me whenever I wasn't working out. Strenuous effort had become part of my daily life.

When I stepped out of the bathhouse, I saw that the lights in the hall across the corridor were switched on.

We had been using this large hall to hold film parties and various training exercises. I had been practicing there, too.

The door was slightly ajar, so I decided to peek inside—and saw Xenovia brandishing a practice sword.

She was wearing her training outfit and swinging her blade with great effort.

I wasn't sure at first whether she had noticed my presence, until she glanced my way.

“...Issei?”

“Yo. I wasn’t trying to peek or anything. I happened to notice the lights were on, so...,” I explained, stepping inside. “Are you practicing?”

“Yep. The match is fast approaching.”

“Sure, but you were exercising earlier today as well, right?”

Like me, Xenovia seemed to have increased the amount of time each day that she spent working out. In fact, she was practicing so hard, she appeared on the verge of burning out. It was like she was possessed.

When they had been sparring together earlier, even Kiba looked like he was about to be overpowered by Xenovia’s ferocious enthusiasm. Unfortunately, that overeagerness of hers had left her open to a counter.

“I’m...not as strong as Kiba,” she admitted frankly.

That was true. Xenovia may have been the stronger of the two back when we had first met her, but that situation had reversed once Kiba’s abilities blossomed and he developed his Holy Demon Swords.

“I realized it when I watched the recording of our last match. He wielded the Durendal better than I can. In terms of basic talent, I can’t match him.” Her shoulders slumped in defeat. Some part of her was jealous of Kiba’s skills.

“From my point of view, you’re both amazing,” I assured, trying to cheer her up.

The words sounded hollow, even to me, but Xenovia flashed me a smile anyway. “Thank you. But I can’t forgive myself... I was retired during our last match without contributing at all. That’s why I’m training. I won’t let down my guard like that again.”

...So that’s what’s bothering her.

In our last match against the Sitri Familia, Xenovia had lost to Sona’s vice-chairwoman Shinra and her Counter-type Sacred Gear.

Xenovia had undeniably had the advantage in terms of raw power, but due to a type disadvantage, poor timing, and bad luck, Shinra had bested her.

After watching the recording again myself, I realized just how formidable that technique was. The depth of the Rating Game was truly profound. Strength

alone wasn't enough to ensure victory.

That said, I did think that we made for a super-powerful team when we fought normally. It was just that carelessness could spell defeat.

"No matter how strong you are, there are always ways to lose. Raw strength might be the easiest path to victory, but in team battles—Rating Games especially—we need to consider whose techniques will have an advantage over which opponents and work together... The road to becoming a high-class demon sure isn't easy, huh?" I let out a sigh, sitting down on the floor.

Yep, the path to success and promotion would be a long one.

"Are you hoping to become a Demon King, Issei?"

"No. I've never even considered that... Why do you ask?"

"You're planning to work independently of the president, aren't you? You want to climb the ladder, right?"

"Yeah, that's the plan."

"Asia said she would go with you."

"Huh? Ah, right. We did promise to always stay together."

"Take me with you."

—.

Now *this* was an unexpected development...

"Why do you want to come with *me*?" I asked.

"Because it's enjoyable being around you, Issei," Xenovia responded with a wide grin.

Huh. So I'm a fun guy?

"All right. I'll think about it."

"Thanks. I'm counting on you, okay?"

I didn't really have a clear image of my future plans, but it sure would be interesting to set up my own demon business with Asia and Xenovia.

As I sat deep in thought, head cocked to one side, Xenovia suddenly paused in

her sword training.

“You know, talking to you has helped me loosen up a little, Issei.” She crouched down beside me, and— *A kiss! A kiss on the cheek! Whoaaaaa! Where did that come from? Seriously, a kiss on the cheek!*

“That’s to thank you. I’ll go for the lips next time. Heh-heh-heh, I guess we should call it a day, then?”

With that, Xenovia took her leave.

All I could do was raise a hand to the cheek that she had so suddenly placed her lips against.



“It’s time,” the prez stated, rising to her feet.

The day of our match had arrived, and we were all gathered in the clubroom. Asia was dressed in her nun’s outfit, while Xenovia was wearing that erotic combat suit of hers. Everyone else wore the usual Kuou Academy uniforms.

We stood in the center of the magic circle and waited to be transported to our destination.

Our opponent was Diodora Astaroth, the next head of the family that had given rise to the Demon King Beelzebub. I didn’t know what kind of abilities he had at his disposal, but there was no doubting that he possessed immense demonic power, enough to defeat his previous opponents single-handedly.

Nonetheless, he was the enemy King. If we could take him down, the match would be over! And we had more than one person on our side with massive raw strength! If Diodora came at me, I would turn the tables on him!

However, I recognized the need for more than one strategy.

Gaining a Counter-type ability couldn’t hurt. Perhaps I should try to learn one?

Sairaorg, for instance, was a supercharged Power-type fighter, the same category I was in. If I was going to turn the tides of battle against him, a reversal of some sort would certainly be useful... No Power-type fighter could afford to turn a blind eye to a Technique-type opponent.

As I racked my brain, worrying over what I could do, Asia nervously took my

hand in her own.

I flashed her a wordless grin in return, tightening my grip around hers.

Right. First things first. We have to take care of Diodora.

I wasn't about to let him have Asia. No matter what kind of demonic powers he was packing, I would protect her!

At that moment, the magic circle at our feet erupted into light, and we made the jump to our destination...

"...Are we there?"

As my vision recovered from the blinding glow of the magic circle, I opened my eyes to find...

A wide, sprawling space.

Pillars spaced at regular intervals rose to the ceiling. Beneath them was a floor of stone. I glanced around uncertainly before laying eyes on what looked like an entrance to a huge temple sanctuary!

It was gigantic, like the kind of temples you found in ancient Greek mythology. But this one seemed to be whole and intact, as if it had only just now been completed.

As usual, the sky was pure white.

Is this our home base? I guess that means it's time for us to get prepared. Was this going to be another blitz-style match? Or maybe a long-haul one? There was no way of telling, but whatever the case, I would carry out my duties!

As I worked up the courage to declare as much aloud, I noticed something curious. No matter how long we waited, there was no announcement from whoever was supposed to be the arbiter of the match.

"...This is strange," the prez observed.

The others were growing equally suspicious.

Had something happened over with the organizers? I tilted my head, trying to fathom what could possibly have gone wrong, when— A magic circle opened up in the opposite direction from the temple!

Huh?! Diodora?! Don't tell me the battle's already started!

I was panicking! We all braced ourselves for the worst!

However, there wasn't just the one magic circle! Numerous other lights popped up, surrounding us from every direction!

"...That isn't the House of Astaroth's insignia!" Kiba growled, readying a blade.

"...I don't recognize any of them," Akeno added, her hand crackling with electricity. "However..."

"They're all demons," the prez finished, taking in our surroundings with a cutting gaze as her crimson aura enveloped her. "But if I remember correctly..."

Demons crept from the teleportation arrays! Each and every one of them looked ready to commit murder! They had us surrounded, their eyes radiating death!

One, two, three... I stopped counting there, as there was no point trying to gauge their numbers. It was well past anything reasonable or fair.

We were encircled by at least several hundred enemies—perhaps even a thousand! The whole area around us was filled to bursting with them!

"Judging by those magic circles, they belong to the old demon regime affiliated with the Khaos Brigade," Rias finished.

—?!

That was enough to scare me out of my wits!

Seriously?! The Khaos Brigade?! Why are they getting involved in a Rating Game between two high-class demon youths?! I get that they're terrorists, but why did it have to be our match?!

"Gremory, kin of the false Demon King—you will perish here!" one of the demons declared.

To these guys, who backed the old guard, anyone related to the current Demon Kings must have been a constant reminder of what they saw as profound injustice.

"Argh!" someone screamed. I recognized the voice as Asia's, but when I spun

around, she was gone!

“Issei!”

Up above!

When I turned my gaze to the sky, I spotted her being carried off by none other than that Diodora scumbag!

D-Diodoraaaaa!

“Hey there, Rias Gremory and Red Dragon Emperor. I’ll be taking Asia Argento off your hands now.”

How could he say something so absurd while still wearing that innocent smile?

“Let go of her, you bastard! You coward! What are you playing at?! Isn’t this supposed to be a Rating Game?!” I shouted after him.

For the first time, Diodora’s smile twisted into an ugly grin. “Just how stupid are you? This isn’t a Rating Game at all. No matter how powerful you all are, you can’t take on this many high-and mid-level demons by yourselves. Ha-ha-ha. Die. The sooner the better.” From above, he gloated at the prez.

“Are you with the Khaos Brigade? You’re despicable. You’ve defiled the dignity of the Rating Game! And trying to spirit away my cute Asia...!” The prez was fuming, her crimson aura exploding in wrath. She was seriously pissed off now!

She was right, of course! I was infuriated, too! What made Diodora think he was going to get away with this?!

“I thought if I worked with them, I would be free to do as I pleased. Struggle as much as you like. In the meantime, I’ll exchange vows with Asia. Do you know what that means, Red Dragon Emperor? It means I’m going to make her mine. If you want to do something about it, come on up to the temple. You’ll be in for a marvel.” Diodora let out a powerful laugh.

At that moment, Xenovia exclaimed, “Issei, the Ascalon!”

“Right!” I called back, activating the Holy Sword, detaching it from my gauntlet, and throwing it her way.

“Asia is my friend! I won’t let you take her!” Xenovia’s eyes were burning with rage.

She leaped into the air, lunging toward Diodora—only for him to loose a barrage of magic projectiles, disrupting her stance. Nonetheless, Xenovia’s blade sent out a wave of holy energy and scored a direct hit!

At least, it looked like one at first. Diodora danced lightly through the air, dodging it!

Dammit! This isn’t going to be that easy, is it?!

“Issei! Xenovia!”

Asia was begging us to help! But at that moment, the air trembled with a deep vibration, space twisting around both her and her captor.

Within a split second, they had both disappeared!

“Asiaaaaa!” I cried out into the empty sky, but there was no response.

...Argh! It happened again! I failed to protect her!

“Issei! Keep your head straight! We need to deal with the enemies in front of us before we can go after her!” Kiba said, trying to rally my spirits.

He was right. Our way forward was simple. We only had to get through this predicament, beat the living daylights out of Diodora, and take back Asia!

Diodoraaaaa! I’ll never forgive you for this!

The demons who had us surrounded evidently served the descendants of the old Demon Kings. My knowledge of demon history wasn’t all that great, but if they got in my way, I would destroy every one of them!

Their hands started letting out a strange glow. They were planning to attack en masse with ranged strikes!

According to Diodora, his army was composed of mid-and high-level demons. Would we be able to defend against a volley from such a large number of strong opponents?

Maybe it would be better to retreat to the shadows and take them down one by one? Or even outright ignore them and charge for the temple?

As I frantically pondered over what to do, there came another shriek.



“Kyahhhh!”

That was Akeno! What happened?! I whirled to find a one-eyed old geezer lifting up her skirt and staring lasciviously at her panties!

“Hmm, what wonderful buttocks. You young’uns have the best curves, the tightest muscles...”

Th-that old fart!

I pulled Akeno away from him! Her ass was mine!

“You old lecher! Where the hell did you crawl from...?! W-wait! It’s you!”

I remembered this guy! He had come to visit me in the hospital after I had gotten all beat up during my last match.

If memory served me right, he was...

“Lord Odin?! What are you doing here?” The prez gawked in surprise.

Right! Odin! One of the Norse gods! A literal deity had appeared!

The old man stroked his snow-white whiskers. “Hmm. It will take too long to explain... Let’s just say that the Khaos Brigade has taken control of this Rating Game.”

So those terrorists did usurp the match!

“The organizing committee is meeting with representatives from each of the various powers to respond to this threat. That said, it’s clear as day from all this that Diodora Astaroth has allied himself with the old guard. He must have received one of those *serpents* from Ophis. That’s the only way to explain his sudden increase in strength. I hope you understand how much danger you’re all in here. You’re going to need help. Unfortunately, the site of this Rating Game has been sealed behind a powerful barrier. It won’t be easy for any of you to break through, let alone destroy it. No, the only way of lowering it is by defeating the one who fashioned it here on the inside.”

“Then how did *you* get in here?” I questioned.

“When I sacrificed my eye to Mímir’s Well, I gained intimate knowledge of all manner of demon powers. This barrier is no exception.” Odin paused there,

flashing us his left eye.

There was a crystal-like object embedded in it, with what looked like arcane glyphs flowing from behind the glass...

My whole body turned stiff as I gazed upon those symbols.

What a dangerous aura... I could sense that even Ddraig was cautious of it.

“Our foe is the chief Norse god! Glory to he who takes him down!”

The followers of the former Demon Kings began to unleash their ranged attacks all at once! With this many projectiles coming our way, we were in trouble!

Just as we prepared to defend ourselves, Odin tapped his staff against the ground.

There was a thunderous rumble as the many magic attacks burst in midair, vanishing entirely!

“Oh-ho-ho!” the old man chuckled as he stroked his whiskers.

He was amazing! Perhaps I should have expected as much from a god! That downpour of deadly projectiles had been nothing to him!

The expressions of the mid-and high-level demons gathered around us soured. They were clearly shocked to learn that their attacks had been so totally ineffective.

“Normally, I would be able to shatter the barrier myself, but it took all my power just to get inside... Hmm, just how many opponents do we have here? Ah well. Here, these are for you all. That good-for-nothing rascal Azazel asked me to give them to you. Using an old man as his errand boy, that wretched stripling...”

The geezer sure could gripe like no one’s business... Nonetheless, he handed each of us a small communication device.

“Now go. Leave these fools to yours truly and get yourselves to that temple. I’ll be covering your backs, understand? Be grateful.” With that, Odin pointed his staff as a white aura gathered around us. “This will protect you until you reach the temple. Run along now.”

“But Odin! Are you going to be all right by yourself?!” I asked, worried.

The elderly god, however, flashed me an amused grin. “For a youngster with so few years under his belt to be concerned about me...” A spear appeared in Odin’s hand. “Gungnir.”

With that one word, he hurled the weapon into the throng of demons, and then—

Booooooooooom!

—an enormous amount of energy erupted from the polearm, the sound of the explosion washing over the whole area!

—!

I couldn’t believe my eyes! That single attack had gouged a gaping tear through the ground as deep as the eye could see! One blow had taken out more enemies than I thought possible! Dozens of our would-be assailants were simply gone!

What power! This was far beyond anything I was used to!

“Just so you know, even us old folks need to stretch our legs once in a while. Now then, terrorist demons. Show me what you’ve got. This doddering, aged fool is stronger than you might first believe!”

Was Odin making it clear that he’d been holding back?! Gods really were in a totally different league...

A wave of nervousness swept through the army of demons. The chance at a little glory wasn’t worth risking their lives, it seemed.

“Thanks! I’ll leave them to you, Odin!” After expressing her gratitude, Rias turned to the rest of us. “Let’s get going to the temple!”

Wasting no time, we all dashed off, the sounds of Odin’s battle at our heels.

No sooner did we reach the entrance of the temple than our communicators all activated.

A familiar voice came through them.

“Are you all right? This is Azazel. I guess old man Odin gave you the

communication headsets? You've probably got a lot of questions, but let me go first. Your Rating Game has been hijacked by followers of the old demon regime working with the Khaos Brigade. The battlefield and the VIP viewing lounge are flooded with attackers. However, we anticipated that this might happen. All of the powers are working together to repel them."

Azazel and the others were having a hard time of this, too, it seemed.

Hold on, what was that about having anticipated this attack...?

"There's been a lot of suspicious deaths lately surrounding the Demon Kings. We've suspected that followers of the old regime might have been behind them. You probably heard that the last heir to the House of Glasya-Labolas died in an accident, but in actual fact, the old regime got to him."

...So Zephyrdor's predecessor had been murdered by the Khaos Brigade, then? Had he been targeted because of his relationship with one of the Demon Kings?

"The masterminds are the descendants of the former Beelzebub and Asmodeus. You remember how I defeated Katerea Leviathan? They hate the current Demon Kings just as much as she did. We're guessing this incursion is meant to be another attack on a relative of one of the current Demon Kings—possibly as the prelude to their plans for establishing a new world order. What better chance could there be than this? We suspected that they might try something after Astaroth's last battle against the House of Agares."

In other words, the old regime had schemed to interfere with this match right from the very beginning. And they were aiming for relatives of the current Demon Kings, along with the top brass of each of the main factions who had come to watch. Odin was likely among the spectators targeted.

"So is Diodora even stronger now than he was before?" the prez asked.

"Those powers must be from Ophis. They probably hadn't expected him to use them in his last match. That, and the incident with the House of Glasya-Labolas, pretty much gave them away, but it appears they've enacted their plan regardless."

That bastard is using power-ups from the terrorist boss?! That's how he won

his last match?! I didn't think Diodora could have ticked me off any more than he already had, yet he had!

"As far as the attackers are concerned, so long as they can finish us off, they don't care whether their plans are exposed. All the same, this is a rare opportunity to crush the followers of the old demon regime once and for all. They've been causing trouble all over the world for far too long. That's the real reason why the current Demon Kings, the seraphs of Heaven, that old geezer Odin, the Greek pantheon, Indra, and all those Buddhas have all come here. We told them about our concerns, and they agreed to help. The only thing they all care about is victory. They're going all out against these chumps from the old guard as we speak."

It was essentially a joint proclamation that they wouldn't succumb to terrorism!

"...So this Rating Game is a wash, then?" the prez questioned.

"Sorry about that, Rias. Wars aren't all that frequent, but when they break out, this is what happens. We've put you all in harm's way this time. Keeping up the illusion of a legitimate match right until the very end was necessary to draw them in, and sure enough, here they are. Still, you're in a dangerous spot, there's no denying that. It took some convincing to get Sirzechs to go along with it."

"What would you have done if they killed us?" I asked as casually as I could.

"I would have taken responsibility for that, too," Azazel replied in all seriousness. "I was willing to put my own neck on the line for this."

If he was truly willing to go that far, then he really was dedicated to eliminating the old guard...

As important as this conversation was, I had to tell Azazel about what had happened!

"Teach, Diodora's taken Asia!"

"— I see. Either way, we can't leave you there any longer. It isn't safe. We'll find Asia. It's about to turn into a real-life battlefield. The followers of the old guard are still teleporting in. There's a hidden basement in the temple. It's built

to weather an assault, so hide down there until the dust settles. We'll eliminate these terrorists. The barrier surrounding the field looks to have been created by Dimension Lost, a Longinus that the Khaos Brigade has gotten their hands on. You can enter, but you can't leave. It's one of the most powerful barrier-producing Sacred Gears out there. Not even Odin will be able to destroy it."

"Are you coming, too, Teach?" I asked.

"Sure, I'm already here. But it's a big battlefield, and I'm a long way off from you guys."

"We'll save Asia," I declared.

"Hey, don't you realize just what kind of situation this is?" Azazel's voice was tinged with anger.

War or not, I wouldn't give in! There was no way I would give up Asia!

"I—I don't really get all that complicated stuff! But Asia is my friend! She's family! I'm going to help her! I never want to lose her again!" I cried.

We could stand here talking all day, but we had no idea what that bastard was going to try doing to her! Just imagining the possibilities was enough to make my blood boil!

The prez flashed us all a fearless grin. "Sorry, Azazel, but we're going to head inside the temple to rescue Asia. The match might be ruined, but I have a score to settle with Diodora. I'll teach him what happens when someone kidnaps a precious member of my Familia!"

Prezzzzz! I knew I could count on you! Right on!

"Azazel. We have the authority to take countermeasures against those who threaten the alliance between the three great powers, do we not?" Akeno asserted. "Now is the time for such action, wouldn't you agree? Diodora has betrayed the present demon authorities."

Whoa! Right! We are supposed to have that right! Thanks, Akeno!

On the other end of the line, Azazel let out a resigned sigh. *"...You kids sure are stubborn, huh? Fine. There are no conditions this time around, then, nothing to hold you back... Go wild! Especially you, Issei! Show that traitorous Diodora*

the full power of the Red Dragon Emperor!”

Yeah! Got it, Teach! Thanks for this!

“Bet on it!” I shouted back, raring to go!

“One more thing, and this is important. The Khaos Brigade has done all this knowing full well that we were onto their scheme. In other words, whatever they’re hoping to achieve, they’re convinced that we can’t stop them.”

What exactly could they be after...? I wondered.

However, before I could come to any form of conclusion, the prez nodded in understanding. “Are you saying that they have a hidden ace?”

“Probably. We don’t have any idea what it is, but there’s no question about it—this place is dangerous. The Rating Game has been interrupted, so you won’t be retiring to safety upon defeat. Remember that. We can’t pull you out if you find yourselves in trouble. Watch your backs.”

Our assailants were so confident that they were willing to keep going with their plan even once it had been partly exposed. I had no idea what they were trying to accomplish, yet it was clear what we had to do!

We would beat the living daylights out of Diodora, rescue Asia, and escape to the basement under the temple! Sure, the fact we couldn’t be transported to safety if we got into trouble was more than a little scary, but we would just have to take down any opponents before they could get to us!

For a moment, I wondered why I always ended up facing such strong enemies. Then something I’d heard before echoed in my mind.

The powerful flock to the presence of a dragon.

Was it because of the Red Dragon Emperor residing inside me that I kept winding up in trouble...?

“Koneko, can you sense Asia?” the prez inquired.

Koneko pointed toward the temple, her ears twitching above her head. “... That way. Asia and Diodora Astaroth are both in there.”

All right! Hang on, Asia! We’ll be there soon!

Everyone exchanged wordless nods before sprinting off into the temple.



The temple's interior was gigantic, the main hall continuing into the distance seemingly without end. Apart from the huge pillars lining either side of the vast room, nothing else stood out.

When we finally reached the end of the chamber, another shrine-like area came into sight. We passed through, only to find ourselves in another hall. This process repeated several times, until at last, we detected the presence of others ahead of us!

Everyone came to a sudden halt, readying ourselves.

At that moment, ten small, hooded figures appeared before us.

"Hey there, Rias Gremory and her Familia."

—!

Diodora's voice sounded through the temple! Where was it coming from?!

"Ha-ha-ha. Oh, Red Dragon Emperor. There's no use glancing around like that. I'm waiting for you in the sanctuary up ahead... Let's play a game. Think of it as a substitute for our canceled match."

What the heck was he going on about now?!

Was he projecting his voice with his demonic powers, perhaps? And what did he mean by "game"?

"Think of this as a match between my pieces and yours. The rules are simple—once you use a piece, you can't use it again until you reach me. Other than that, anything goes. In the first round, I'll use my eight Pawns and two Rooks. Just so you know, my Pawns have already Promoted to Queens. Ha-ha-ha, eight Queens as my opening move! You're fine with that, aren't you? After all, your servants are renowned for their abilities, are they not, Rias Gremory?"

This was absurd! He was telling us to fight eight Queen-Promoted Pawns along with two Rooks?! That was ten opponents in total!

With their hooded cloaks, I couldn't make out the faces of Diodora's servants. If memory served correctly, his Pawns were all girls, though!

Damn, he's one lucky bastard... A harem Familia... No, now isn't the time to be getting jealous!

"Very well. I'll play along with your charade. Watch as I carve into your skull just what my Familia is capable of!"

The prez was going along with it?! Seriously?! Was she really okay with that?

"Are you sure about this?" I asked.

"We don't have much choice," Rias responded, glowering at our foes. "...They have Asia as a hostage."

—.

Right. There was no telling what might happen if we disobeyed and provoked Diodora unnecessarily.

"Issei, Koneko, Xenovia, Gasper—you're on," the prez said, pointing to each of us in turn.

Four against ten?! We're a little short on numbers, aren't we?!

"Gather around."

At Rias's order, we huddled together.

"We'll leave the two Rooks to Xenovia. Don't hold back. Crush them with everything you've got," the prez instructed, her voice at a whisper.

Xenovia nodded. "Got it. That's my forte."

She looked positively raring to go! Still, she was right. So long as there were no handicaps or rules limiting her, Xenovia was capable of dealing with two Rooks. She was a Power-type fighter, after all.

"Koneko, you take the offense against the Pawns. Use your sage magic to disrupt the flow of their energy. Issei and Gasper, your job is to support Koneko. But you are both the key to this fight. Issei, let Gasper have a taste of your blood."

"...All right."

"Got it!"

“If you say so, President!”

We all nodded along in acknowledgment.

The prez had one more thing for me, however, speaking it softly into my ear so that only I heard it. “Issei...”

“Right... H-hold on, what...?”

My voice trembled at what she had just told me.

Seriously?! Is she sure about that?

I asked Rias again to double-check, and she confirmed it.

All riiiiight!

I rejoiced from the bottom of my heart! The fear that had gripped me just a moment ago had completely vanished!

I—we—could do this! We could win!

“Shall we get started?”

As Diodora’s voice echoed around us, his servants readied themselves.

I let Kiba make a shallow cut on my finger with his Demon Sword and offered it to Gasper.

Throb!

I could feel Gasper’s heart pulsating. The next moment, a strange aura enveloped his body, his eyes emitting a shadowy crimson gleam. His whole bearing changed in a flash. *Now we were ready!*

Xenovia retrieved Durendal from its spatial rift, assuming a dual-bladed fighting stance with Ascalon as she approached the two Rooks.

“We’ll be taking Asia back,” she declared coolly.

An unprecedented sense of pressure was emanating from her entire body.

Her gaze alone was acutely piercing.

“...I never had anyone I could call a friend. I always thought the love of the Lord was all I needed.”

Whoosh!

Her two opponents leaped toward her. They were fast, especially for Rooks! Xenovia, however, didn't so much as flinch.

"Then I met people who were willing to treat me with kindness and respect. Asia in particular always had a smile for me. And she was willing to call me her friend."

Xenovia, we're all your friends and companions!

She evaded the Rooks' heavy attacks with a melancholy cast to her eyes.

"...I said something terrible to Asia when I first met her. I called her a witch, a heretic. But still, she treated me as if none of that had ever happened. She was still willing to be my friend!"

Xenovia... Has that been bothering you all this time?

"That's why I'm going to save her! My best friend, Asia!"

Whoosh!

Durendal released a destructive wave, hurling the two Rooks clear from the field of battle.

Whirling, Xenovia swung the weapon up high, her voice rich with emotion as she cried out, "Hear me, Durendal! I can't stand to lose her! Without her... Please! Give me the power to save my friend! Durendaaaaal!"

Booooooooooom!

Responding to Xenovia's words, Durendal's holy aura swelled to several times its original size! It was massive! Even from where I was standing, my skin tingled as though stabbed with countless needles!

Durendal...was glowing with an intensity at least ten times its original strength...

Cr-crack!

Through no more than that sacred weapon's incredible power, fissures began to erupt all around Xenovia.

"I realize that I can't handle Durendal well. It may be a long time before I can

control it as delicately and as precisely as Kiba does. But that won't stop me from going all out, from increasing its destructive potential to a ferocious level!"

Xenovia paused there, crossing her two blades above her head. As she did so, Durendal's tremendous energy flowed into the Ascalon, its own holy aura swelling in turn.

The Ascalon began to pulsate in concert with the Durendal, the two auras feeding into each other.

"Go! Durendal! Ascalon! Help save my friend! Answer my caaaaall!"

Vast pillars of light erupted from the swords, gouging a gaping hole in the ceiling of the temple! And with that, Xenovia brought the blades down on the two Rooks!

Vrrrrrrrrrrr!

The twin waves of holy energy merged, engulfing their targets!

Booooooooooom!

The temple's foundation rocked! When the shaking subsided, I saw two huge craters torn into the ground. Those pillars that had been caught in the attack were gone, along with a distant wall. Even the ceiling up above was no more! From what I could tell, that surge had decimated more than half the temple complex!

An unrestrained Xenovia sure was incredible! What's more, it was a holy power! To a demon, that attack must have been lethal! Enough to annihilate someone without leaving so much as a trace! And sure enough, there was no sign of the Rooks!

They hadn't seemed at all weak in the recording of their match against the Agares girl. Heck, they had come across as formidable opponents, yet now...

If Xenovia had used that attack in our last match, the rule against damaging the arena would have meant immediate disqualification...

Her breathing was ragged. From the look of it, she wouldn't be losing another attack like that anytime soon...

Still, she had done her job. Now it was our turn!

“Koneko, Gasper! Let’s go!” I called.

““Right!””

That was what I wanted to hear!

“Meow!”

Koneko’s cat ears and tail stood up on end as she let out an adorable sound! Yep! Her *nekomata* mode was enough to give me a fresh nosebleed!

Our remaining opponents were eight Pawns, each already Promoted to a Queen! They may have been the strongest pieces available, but I had a hidden tactic!

“First things first, it’s time for a Promotion!”

During a Rating Game, I could only Promote once I entered the enemy team’s home base, but as the match had been called off, I could do it at any time, so long as I had the prez’s permission!

I could feel the energy welling up inside me! I could do this!

“Boost!”

Next, I pushed my Boosted Gear as far as it would go!

“Explosion!”

My demonic powers rushed to my head! It was time to release it once more, my forbidden ability!

“Arise, my lust! Go, my imagination! Expand, O world of my dreams!”

A mysterious state fell upon me!

“Prezzzzz! I’m a pervert! A sex fiend! But I’m activating this technique for you! No, for *me*!”

With that vow, I locked on to the chests of the eight female Pawns standing before me!

For the time being, I would just ignore the bewildered expression that the prez flashed me.

“Boob-Lingual!”

This was it! My secret breast translation technique was working! They wouldn't be able to escape from this!

“Hey, breasts of all you Pawns! It's time to spill your plans! Let's start from you over on the right!”

I closed my eyes, calling out to the chest of the first Pawn! And so, in voices that only I could hear, they began to speak back to me!

“We're going to take care of that meddlesome vampire first!”

“The three of us will deal with him!”

“Die, vampire, die!”

Whoa! I opened my eyes and let my two companions know what I had just learned!

“That girl, that one over there, and that one, too—they're going to go for Gasper! Gasper, stop them in their tracks!”

“O-okaaaayyyy!”

At my instruction, my underclassman froze the three Pawns in question with his Sacred Gear ability!

Caught in his field of vision, the Pawns stopped in place!

All right! He got them! My blood was doing wonders helping him control his ability!

I turned to the next Pawn. “What are you guys up to?”

“Oh my, they're completely frozen! Uh-oh, it won't be long until they realize that we're after the nekomata!”

“Is this that terrible power of his, the one that lets him hear the voices of our breasts? How terrifying! I was about to take down the nekomata, but at this rate...! Don't tell me he can see through any defensive techniques we might try...?”

“The nekomata will catch on to what we're up to!”

These ones are going to attack Koneko! Who do they think they are?! Hold on, did they mention a countermeasure to my Boob-Lingual?

I guess that did make sense, though. How else could eight women hope to attack us out in the open?

“Gasper, those three are targeting Koneko! Freeze them!”

“O-okaaaayyyy!”

With a flash of his eyes, the next three Pawns were immobilized!

Perfect! Now we just had to deal with the remaining two!

“Bwa-ha-ha-ha! We’re unstoppable! You eight Pawns might have Promoted to Queens, but you’re crumbling in the face of our combo attack!” I let out a sinful snort!

This was fun! So long as we were facing women, my technique would let me read all their movements ahead of time! And with my friends beside me, we could unleash the ultimate combo attack!

Once I knew the enemy’s plans, Gasper could freeze them before they ever had a chance. Gasper didn’t have much combat experience, so he couldn’t use his Sacred Gear well when faced with an unpredictable opponent, but it was another matter entirely when I directed him!

Diodora must have miscalculated. He had failed to appreciate just how formidable my Boob-Lingual technique truly was and had sent a team of women against us! Even I was taken aback by how smoothly things were going. My tactic succeeded even against those Pawns who had prepared some defense against my mind-reading power.

Well, technically, I wasn’t reading their minds but rather asking their breasts for advice. That subtle difference likely explained why their countermeasures had been so ineffective.

Only two left. They were clearly terrified of our joint attack, cautiously backing away.

Heh-heh-heh, you girls must be frightened, no? You know we can read your every move!

“...Why do I get the feeling that *you’re* the bad guy here?”

Another biting comment from Koneko! I mean, she wasn’t wrong! Still, this

was all for the sake of victory! Our situation demanded that I sink into depravity! Above all else, we had to save Asia. Thus, I would interrogate those breasts to my heart's content!

I slowly approached the paused Pawns, brushing my hand against their clothes.

Rip!

The second I did so, their outfits came flying clean off, leaving them stark naked!

Well, hello there! Aren't we a beautiful bunch?

I hadn't been able to glimpse their faces when they had been hooded, but I recognized now that Diodora had a discerning eye when it came to women.

That pretty boy bastard infuriated me more every second! Damn if these ladies didn't have nice bodies, though!

As blood dripped from my nose yet again, I let out a victorious cackle. I made my way to the other frozen Pawns, using my Dress Break technique on them, too. One of them had huge breasts! I would have to save a mental image of them for later.

Since they were all caught in Gasper's power, I could do whatever I wanted with them now.

"...Heh-heh-heh. Watch and learn. Once they can't move, they're completely defenseless. I can destroy their clothes at will. When I combine my Boob-Lingual and Dress Break techniques, I'm practically invincible against women..."

I trembled at the possibilities. I never would have suspected that my unquenchable sexual desires could develop into such might... Before me, the two remaining Pawns were quivering in fear at the thought of my reading the thoughts of their breasts, stopping them in their tracks, stripping their clothes away, and beholding their naked flesh. I had to assume there was no greater humiliation!

I remembered something that Azazel had said to me a while back: *"He who conquers breasts conquers the world."*

“Teach, I’m starting to think I’ll be able to overcome all tits one day,” I muttered.

Yep, nothing would stop me from dominating these tits!

“Now then, what are you two ladies hiding?” With a vulgar grin, I began to reach out to them, my fingers groping at the air, when— *Thud!*

Koneko punched me in the face!

...Ow. That hurt, Koneko...

“...Let’s hurry up and knock them out, you sick freak,” she spat as she knocked down the frozen Pawns.

I quickly motioned to Gasper, who stopped the remaining two.

There was no winning against Koneko. I did as she commanded.

When battling girls, there was nothing more powerful, nothing more menacing, than my Boob-Lingual technique combined with Gasper’s time-freezing gaze.

“Phew. We’ve won the first round.”

Koneko, Xenovia, Gasper, and I had easily defeated all eight Pawns and both Rooks.

Before the battle, I had been apprehensive at the seemingly disadvantageous situation, but we’d overcome the odds with little difficulty.

Just as Azazel had said, without any restrictions or rules holding us back, we were an incredible team. Nonetheless, as Sairaorg had pointed out, we could still lose if we allowed ourselves to grow complacent.

There was a lot more depth to battle than I had expected. If any of those Pawns had been men, we would probably have had a real challenge ahead of us. For once, I was grateful that Diodora was such a womanizer. I mean, that was the only explanation I could think of for why he had recruited girls exclusively. *That* was something I could relate to.

Those Pawns had been unable to draw on their abilities after Koneko had used her sage magic to disrupt their auras, while Gasper’s time-freezing eyes

had suspended their consciousness long enough for us to tie them all up against the pillars lining the room.

Now Diodora only had his Queen, two Knights, two Bishops, and himself.

“Let’s go.”

At the prez’s urging, we made our way into the temple sanctuary, where three enemies awaited.

“...I saw these three on the recording. If memory serves correctly, these are the two Bishops and the Queen,” Kiba said.

How on earth could he tell? They were all shrouded in the exact same hooded robes. I couldn’t distinguish them. Had he worked it out from the height? Or their auras?

Additionally, I had to wonder why Diodora dispatched his Queen in the second round? Was his strategy simply to send in his strongest fighters, like he had done with his empowered Pawns?

As far as I had been able to tell from the recording of their last match, the two Knights were nowhere near Kiba’s level.

“We’ve been waiting for you, Rias Gremory.” So saying, Diodora’s Queen lifted her hood to reveal her face.

Whoa! She was a real beauty! A mature, gorgeous blond with crystalline blue eyes!

From memory, one of the Bishops was a woman and the other a man, but as neither of them revealed their faces, it was hard to be sure. They both excelled in Support-type skills.

In terms of raw demonic power, they were probably even more capable than Asia and Gasper, though our Bishops’ Support-type abilities were better suited to battle. After all, we had a healer and the ability to freeze our opponents in place.

The real issue was undoubtedly the Queen. In her last match, she had fought Seekvaira Agares’s Queen one-on-one and had ultimately emerged the victor. Her fire demonic powers had been incredible.

“Oh dear, I suppose it’s my turn?” Akeno stepped forward!

“Yuuto, the two remaining Knights shouldn’t be too much for you to handle alone.”

Hold on, the prez, too?!

Our Two Great Ladies were going to fight side by side!

“Oh, President. I can take care of these three by myself,” Akeno assured.

“Don’t be ridiculous. You may have a handle on your Holy Lightning technique, but I won’t allow you take unnecessary risks. No, the best approach is to minimize any damage we might receive here.”

Akeno’s Holy Lightning and Rias’s powers of destruction! Even individually, they were daunting on the battlefield, and they were fighting together now! There was no need to worry about such a dynamic duo!

At that moment, Koneko poked me from the side.

Hmm? What is it?

She motioned for me to bend down and whispered in my ear.

Hmm. Oh? I see, I see.

“Are you sure?”

“...Yes. It will help Akeno to power up.”

I didn’t exactly see how doing something like that would help, but if Koneko was asking it of me, I was willing to try.

“Akeno,” I called out.

She glanced over her shoulder at me.

“Um, if you can take out this group, I’ll take you on a date next Sunday!”

I paused there, turning back to Koneko. “Hey, are you sure this will work? I don’t think a date will be enough to—”

Zap! Bang! Crash!

Bolts of electricity exploded all around us. When I glanced back at Akeno—her whole body was enveloped in a shroud of Holy Lightning!

“...Oh-ho-ho. Oh-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho! A date with Issei!”

Whoa! Her expression was ecstatic as she hurled bolts from on high!

“How awful, Issei! You already have *me*! What are you thinking, inviting only Akeno with you on a date?!”

Whaaaa—?!

Now the prez was tearfully entreating me! What on earth was going on here?!

“Oh-ho-ho, Rias. This is proof that Issei’s affections have passed to me. Isn’t it time for you to give up?”

“Wh-wh-what are you saying?! I—I don’t need to hear that from the likes of you! Honestly, spewing your lightning everywhere all because of one d-d-d-date!”

Huh? Huuuuuuh? Are they having another quarrel?

“What was that? What right do you have to tell me what I can and can’t do? I don’t see him making love to *you*. Maybe you just don’t have the right charms?”

“Th-that’s not fair! Th-the other day...”

“The other day...?”

“...He touched my breasts while we were in bed.”

“...Wasn’t that just because he moves around in his sleep?”

“...A-and I kissed him. Twice.”

Damn, the prez’s voice sounded incredibly cute. She was acting like a normal teenage girl.

“In that case, maybe *I* should kiss him right now. Three times. With my tongue. Right in front of you.”

“Akeno! No! You can’t! I don’t even want to imagine your tongue in my Issei’s mouth! He’s *mine*!”

...Just what were these Two Great Ladies of mine discussing in the thick of battle? How had it come to another argument over me? I appreciated the attention, but still...

Even the enemy Queen and Bishops looked to be at a total loss.

The Queen had evidently reached her limit, however, because her aura burst into intense flame as she cried out, “That’s enough, you two! How dare you ignore us to bicker over a man—”

““Shut up!””

Booooooooooom!

Akeno and the prez released an unprecedented blast of energy at the Queen and the two Bishops! It was so huge and overpowering that a chill ran down my spine just looking at it!

Rias’s destructive powers mingled with Akeno’s Holy Lightning, washing mercilessly over their targets and annihilating surrounding portions of the temple!

Plumes of smoke rose up from the Queen and two Bishops. Each lay motionless on the ground.

It didn’t take an expert to see they were down for the count... And it was all because they had tried to butt in on an argument between Akeno and the prez...

This might sound strange coming from me, but our three opponents had just suffered a terrible fate. This was what happened when you angered the Two Great Ladies.

Unfortunately, Rias and Akeno’s victory didn’t put an end to their arguing!

“What do *you* know about Issei’s body?! *I’ve* seen it all, every last detail!”

“You might have seen it, but you haven’t touched it or taken it inside you, right? You’re just talk, Rias! I’m ready to accept him in me anytime, anywhere!”

“Nghhhhh! Let’s put that aside for now. We’ll finish this after we save Asia.”

“Indeed. Asia is like a little sister to me, too.”

Ah, they were finally in agreement on something!

And so, having defeated Diodora’s Queen and Bishops, we continued forward.

“Asia, your father and I are looking forward to seeing you at the Sports Festival.”

“We’ll be sure to capture your greatest moments on camera! Ah, you’re so adorable when you run, Asia!”

Shortly before we’d set out for the Rating Game, my mom and dad had been busy joyfully double-checking the video camera and making sure everything was ready.

Months had passed since Asia started living with us, yet it felt like no time at all. My parents treated her with the same love and affection that they would have shown to their own child.

“Geez, you’re both acting like you’ve adopted her. I guess there’s no place for your son anymore,” I complained to my mom.

“Oh? That’s because Asia is so much cuter than you are. If only you could understand what it feels like to be the parent of such a lecherous son. Asia is like a breath of fresh air.”

“Yep. Your mom is right.”

Dammit! I had practically lost the love of my parents! I couldn’t help being a perverted high schooler!

“...I—I never knew my real parents...,” Asia stammered, her face turning red. “Being with you all, I can’t help but wonder if this is what it feels like to have a family... I—I’m sorry. I’m just here on homestay... I shouldn’t act so familiar...”

“I think of you like a real daughter,” my dad stated without the slightest hesitation.

My mom shone Asia a kind smile. “So do I, Asia. Actually, *we* were worried about bothering *you*. You see, all we’ve had is our idiotic son, so we were so happy when you moved in with us. Isn’t that right, darling?”

“Yep. Think of us as your real parents while you’re here with us in Japan, Asia. This is *your* home, too.”

“That’s right. You’re welcome anytime. There’s no need to stand on ceremony.”

I could see that my parents genuinely cared for her. They had accepted Asia into their hearts.

Asia began to tear up. My mom and dad must have thought they had done something to upset her, but she quickly shook her head to dismiss that concern. "...I'm sorry. I'm so, so happy... Mother... Father... I... I..." She was shedding tears of joy.

I moved to pat her gently on the head. "This is your home, Asia. Mom, Dad, and I—we're your family. And the prez and the others think of you that way as well. You don't ever have to worry about that. You're welcome here forever," I said with an encouraging grin.

At this, she beamed. That smile of Asia's was something that I wanted to protect, that I *would* protect, at all costs.

We're family, Asia. Your home is with us, okay?

So let's go home, all of us.

I'll save you, Asia! Just you wait!



We stepped into the next room of the temple sanctuary, expecting to find Diodora's Knights waiting for us. Instead, we were greeted by an unpleasant yet familiar sight.

"Yo. How's it hanging?"

It was a white-haired priest.

"Freed!" I exclaimed.

Yep, it was none other than that psycho! We hadn't seen him since the Excalibur incident. Apparently, he was still alive.

"You're wondering how I'm still breathing, aren't you, my dear little Issei? Yes you are, yes you are. Sorry to break it to you, but I'm a hard guy to kill."

"Stop reading my mind!"

How did that bastard always seem to know what I was thinking?!

Hold on, what about the two Knights? Weren't they supposed to be the ones

waiting here...? More appropriately, what is Freed even doing here?

“Oh, don’t tell me you’re wondering where those two dashing Knights have gone?” That nutjob flashed me a repulsive grin.

He lifted his hand to his mouth, retrieving something that he looked to have been chewing on—a finger!

“I ate them.”

What the...? He ate them...?

Koneko grimaced, covering her nose with her hand. “...That man is no longer human,” she muttered with undisguised revulsion.

Freed’s lips curled in amusement as he let out an unmistakably monstrous cackle!

“Gwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! After you dirty little demons cut me down, that bastard Vali brought me back! Can you believe it?! And that scumbag Azazel fired me! Meeeee!”

Blargh!

With a strange sound, Freed’s body began to swell, his clothes tearing as what looked like horns sprouted out from his body! Not only that, he was increasing in height, his arms and legs bulging several times their original size!

“It was the Khaos Brigade that scooped me up after you all left me for dead! Yes! They promised to give me power, and lo and behold! Gwa-ha-ha-ha! They remade me into a chimera! Bwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

A single bat-like wing sprouted from his back, and what looked like a gigantic arm formed opposite it.

His face practically melted before our eyes, his mouth drooping to reveal a set of protruding fangs, his skull elongating like a dragon’s head!

...What on earth?!

Then there were his arms and legs! His whole body was warped, mangled beyond recognition! There was no sense whatsoever to its construction! Who could have made something like that?!

The creature standing before us no longer resembled Freed in the slightest.

Judging by their disgusted frowns, the other club members were just as disturbed as I was.

The Khaos Brigade may have remade his body, but this...this was just too horrendous!

“Gwa-ha-ha-ha! By the way, have you heard about Diodora Astaroth’s little hobby? It’s titillatingly insane, enough to melt my heart!”

So now Freed was talking about Diodora?

“It’s his taste in women. He has such a voracious appetite, and he likes nothing better than girls from the Church! Nuns are his favorite!”

His taste in women...? Nuns...?

Asia was a perfect fit for that description...

Freed’s grin widened. “He only preys on fervent, true believers. Do you see what I’m getting at? His servants, the ones you all defeated just now, are all former members of the Church! That goes for every member of his Familia! They’re all once-famous nuns and Holy Maidens from all corners of the world! Bwa-ha-ha-ha! Seriously something, huh?! That dandy demon kid seduced the lot of them and reduced them to his playthings! Oh wait, that’s what demons do, isn’t it?! Whispering in the ears of devoted Holy Maidens and dragging them down to Hell! That’s what you call whispering with the tongue of the Devil!”

“Hold on a minute. Then Asia—”

But Freed chortled in amusement before I could finish. “Who do you think wrote the script for Asia’s fall from the Church? It was him, Diodora Astaroth! The plot goes like this: One day, this precocious demon brat who loved screwing religious sisters set his sights on an incredibly beautiful Holy Maiden. The minute he saw her, he wanted to get into her pants. But she was so devoted to the Church that he realized he was going to need to work out a proper strategy to drag her out.”

...Hold up a second. I-in that case, Asia’s expulsion from the Church—

“But the dear Holy Maiden was such an inherently kind, gentle girl. After

digging around, the dandy demon kid heard that she possessed this incredible Sacred Gear capable of healing even demons. And that gave him an idea. *‘If someone were to see her healing dear old me, the Church will chuck her right out!’* Wounding himself and living with a scar was a small price to pay if he could screw her brains out afterward! And why not? That’s how that guy lives his life!”

“...I don’t regret saving him.”

Asia’s smile as she had said those words flashed before my eyes.

...

What the hell? That is so, so...

As if to drive the insult home, Freed went on. “The little demon boy realized that if she got kicked out of the Church, her only home, she would be completely ruined. Without her faith in God, she would have nowhere to turn but to him! Bwa-ha-ha-ha! What better way to spice things up than by adding a touch of suffering! He could scoop her up from the depths of despair and then defile her to his heart’s content! Corrupting her mind and body would be a snap! What greater pleasure for a demon who revels in ruining holy women?! Yep, that’s who he is! Diodora Astaroth likes nothing better than deflowering the Church’s most faithful maidens! Bwa-ha-ha-ha!”

I...

Something was raging within me, unrestrained.

I was clenching my fists so tightly that blood had started seeping down my fingers...

I was this close to taking a step toward Freed and unleashing my hatred on him, when— Kiba placed a hand on my shoulder. “Issei. I know how you feel. But you should save your rage for Diodora,” he said, his voice positively frigid.

Yet all that did was fan the flames of my anger even more!

“Are you telling me to just—?”

I reached out to grab him by the collar and stopped.

His face...

Kiba's eyes were brimming with the same fury that filled me.

"Leave Freed to me. I'll shut that filthy mouth of his." With that, Kiba walked past me; even his gait screamed with rage.

His aura, filled with such raw, murderous anger, temporarily quelled my own fury.

Kiba stopped a short distance in front of Freed, summoning a Holy Demon Sword in his hand.

"Well, well, well. If it isn't that wretched little Knight who smashed me up last time! I guess I should be thanking you for this upgrade! I'm a lot stronger now, you realize? Enough to gobble up Diodora's Knights like potato chips! And now I've absorbed *their* skills, too! Freed Sellzen is invincible now, Mr. Casanova!"

So he had literally consumed the two Knights?! He really was a monster!

Kiba's response was short, chilling, and to the point. "The world would be a better place without you in it."

"Don't get cocky now, kid!" Freed, indignant, began launching blade after blade out of his own body, sending them bearing down on Kiba.

Whoosh!

His target, however, vanished.

Clang!

Suddenly, Freed collapsed into more pieces than I could count!

"When did you get so strong...?" gasped Freed's head as it rolled across the ground, his eyes frozen wide in shock.

Kiba had slain Freed in a single blow!

He must have struck in the blink of an eye at the first sight of Freed's oncoming attack, deciding the duel in an instant! Whoa... My eyes hadn't even registered the movement.

"...Heh-heh-heh. Well, it's not like you'll be able to beat Diodora or the guys backing him. And you don't have the faintest idea of the true horrors of the Longinuses... Heh-heh-heh..."

Splat!

Kiba stabbed his blade through what remained of Freed's head, ending his life.

With a final swing of his blade, Kiba sent Freed's blood splattering across the ground.

"You can save that mouth of yours for the Devil in Hell."

Our handsome pretty boy even gave a catchphrase!

...Daaaaamn!

I was a guy, and even I had to acknowledge just how cool that was!

Had Kiba leveled up again? It all happened so fast that I hadn't even been able to get a gauge of Freed's strength. All I knew was that Kiba was overwhelmingly powerful.

Freed...



It seemed that fate had thrown us into an unfortunate entanglement, but now that he was dead, I didn't know what to say.

Depending on how you looked at it, he was also a victim. Now wasn't the time to think about that, however. We had to save Asia!

"Let's go, everyone!" I called.

Once more, we resumed our advance.

Diodora...

You are beyond forgiveness!

Ouroboros

I—Azazel—had eliminated a considerable number of demons allied with the old regime from the Rating Game battlefield. My subordinates would be able to deal with the rest.

Thus, I launched myself up into the sky.

The jewel that housed the dragon Fafnir was guiding my way.

It had begun to let out a brilliant glow the moment that Odin transported me and my subordinates through the barrier.

I alighted in a corner of the battlefield in front of someone, the jewel burning at its brightest yet.

A small-bodied girl with a graceful countenance received me. She was garbed in a black dress and her similarly dark hair came down to her hips.

Despite noticing me, her eyes remained fixed on the temple in the distance.

I narrowed my eyes, my voice soft. "I would never have expected to find *you* here."

The young woman turned toward me, her lips curling in a faint smile. "Azazel. It's been so long."

"Weren't you an old man the last time we met? I admit I much prefer your newest form. What are you up to, Ophis?"

Yes, this was none other than the Ouroboros Dragon, Ophis! There was no mistaking that ominous, unsettling aura. This was the legendary Infinite Dragon, the head of the Khaos Brigade!

The dragon had taken the form of an elderly man during our previous encounter but was now a small girl. Well, that was only window dressing. She could change her appearance however much she pleased.

If Ophis had come here personally, then this operation had to be of special importance to her...

She had been watching the temple, which no doubt meant that *something* was taking place inside... Maybe it hadn't been such a good idea to send Issei, Rias, and the others in there...

"I'm here to observe. That's all."

"Watching on from afar, huh? Still, it's quite surprising for the big boss to make an appearance. I don't suppose I could usher in an era of peace by taking you down here and now?" I flashed Ophis a forced grin, pointing my spear of light toward her.

The young woman, however, shook her head. "Impossible. You can't defeat me, Azazel," she stated flatly.

She was probably right about that. I didn't stand much chance by myself. That said, if I *could* defeat her, it would deal a near-fatal blow to the Khaos Brigade.

"What about the two of us?"

Swoosh.

With a powerful burst of air, a giant figure descended beside Ophis and me—a dragon!

"Tannin!"

It was a former Dragon King!

I thought he was busy with the cleanup operation taking care of the followers of the old Demon King regime; he must have finished early.

Tannin glared at Ophis with his huge eyes. "These demon youths are fighting

for their futures. You have no right to interfere, Ophis! You were always so disinterested in worldly affairs! What prompted you to join hands with these terrorists?!”

I nodded in response to Tannin’s question. “Don’t tell me you’re just killing time. You’ve already caused enough damage.”

Since Ophis had taken the leading role in the terrorist organization, she had lent her powers to a great many already dangerous individuals. The number of dead as a result of her actions was climbing by the day and had reached a level we could no longer ignore.

What exactly could have prompted her to ally herself with the Khaos Brigade? I just couldn’t wrap my head around it. Why would the strongest, most powerful being in existence, an individual who had long had no interest in lesser affairs, decide to start meddling now?

Ophis’s response was beyond my wildest expectations. “A world of silence.”

...

I blinked with incomprehension. “Huh?” I tried asking again.

This time, Ophis looked me square in the eye and stated, “I want to return to a world of silence, my home in the space between dimensions. That’s all.”

—!

Th-that was her grand motivation? The space between dimensions? To cut a long explanation short, a dimensional wall existed between the human realm, the underworld, and Heaven, a boundary that separated each plane from the next. It was supposedly an empty void filled with boundless nothing.

I was aware that Ophis had been born there, and yet...

“...You’re homesick? If it were anywhere else, I might laugh, but the dimensional void? Isn’t—?”

“Yes. The Great Red is there.” Ophis nodded.

He was presently in control of the dimensional void. Was Ophis trying to find some way to draw him out so she could return there?

She hadn't aligned herself with the followers of the old demon regime and dissenters from the other powers on the condition that they help her drive out the Great Red, had she?

At that moment, another possibility flashed before my eyes.

Right. Vali. So that's your true objective!

Just as I came to that realization, a magic circle appeared beside Ophis as someone teleported in.

It was a man garbed in an aristocratic suit. He bowed my way and flashed me a fearless grin. "Greetings. I believe that this is our first time meeting in person. I am Creuserey Asmodeus, heir to the true Asmodeus. As a representative of the Khaos Brigade and of the true rulers of demonkind, I entreat you, governor of the fallen angels, to face me in a duel."

Ha-ha-ha, another one...?

Yet another one of the terrorist ringleaders had thrown in his chips.

"So you're the old demon regime's Asmodeus, huh?" I asked, scratching my head.

Boom!

At that moment, a dark, explosive aura erupted from his body. Evidently, he'd received some of Ophis's power.

"Not *old*—I am of the blood of the *true* Demon Kings! I shall avenge Katerea Leviathan!"

Is he Katerea's lover or something? It hardly matters, I suppose. If I could eliminate another one of the Khaos Brigade's ringleaders, this was a chance that I couldn't pass up. I would have to accept his challenge.

"All right, then. Are you up for this, Tannin?"

"I'm not so uncouth as to interrupt a duel. I'll keep an eye on Ophis."

That dragon sure had a warrior's noble heart... He was putting his good qualities to waste sticking in his draconic form all the time.

"Fine," I responded. "It's getting a bit chaotic out here, but I'm guessing those

kids should have had enough time to reach Diodora by now.”

Ophis, however, shook her head. “I’ve provided Diodora Astaroth a serpent. Now that he has consumed it, his powers have increased exponentially. Defeating him won’t be easy.”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” I burst into laughter. She didn’t get it! She just didn’t understand who she was dealing with here!

“Why are you laughing?” Ophis inquired, tilting her head to one side.

“A serpent, huh? Well, that’s something. But unfortunately for Diodora, it won’t be enough.”

“Why not? My serpents grant tremendous power.”

“I’m telling you it won’t matter. Those kids couldn’t show off their full potential in their last match because of all the extra rules, but now...”

Now, Diodora Astaroth was about to learn firsthand what all that training with Tannin had done for Issei’s abilities.

That kid had spent the better part of a month being chased around by a legendary Dragon King—the only one of his kind still at large. Tannin may have held back a little, but a normal person wouldn’t have survived that training. Heck, anyone else would have been killed on the first day.

Yet Issei had endured. He had returned to us alive and even managed to unlock his Balance Breaker!

Ophis still didn’t comprehend what that meant!

I retrieved the jewel that contained the essence of Fafnir along with my artificial Sacred Gear in the design of a short sword.

“Fafnir, I’m gonna need your help again. We’re up against Creuserey Asmodeus! Let’s do this! Balance Breaker!”

In the blink of an eye, a full set of golden armor wrapped around my body.

Issei, there’s nothing to hold you back now. Give him hell!

Just before I could engage my foe, another magic circle opened up nearby.

That insignia... I see you’ve deigned to make an appearance.

A crimson-haired Demon King emerged from that luminous burst of light—Sirzechs.

“What are you doing here?”

The Demon King narrowed his eyes at my question. “I let my little sister get caught up in our plan. The least I could do is help out. It wouldn’t be right to leave everything to you, Azazel. I’d never be able to face Rias if I did.”

Geez, I should have expected as much...

“You damn moron. There’s no way they’ll talk,” I said, lowering my weapon.

“Even so, as one of the reigning Demon Kings, I must try.”

The moment he laid eyes on the Demon King, Creuserey exploded in rage. “Sirzechs! You blighted fraud! How dare you show your face?! Because of you, all of you, we...!”

Face it, Sirzechs. These guys despise you and the other Demon Kings more than anything else in the world. That’s just reality.

“Creuserey. It isn’t too late to talk. Even now, I wonder whether we were right to banish the descendants of the old Demon Kings, to drive them into the deepest corners of the underworld. Surely, there’s a better solution. I want to negotiate with you and the other families. In particular, I would like you to speak directly with the current Asmodeus, Falbium.” Sirzechs’s words were sincere—and that was why Creuserey would have none of it.

It’s no use, buddy.

To begin with, these guys were never going to accept the word of one of the present Demon Kings. That was pure naïveté.

As expected, Creuserey shouted, “How dare you mock me! You have allied yourself not only with the fallen angels, but with Heaven, too! You are a fraud! Unworthy to address me, a *true* Demon King! Know your place!”

I let out a resigned sigh. “You’re one to talk. You and your Khaos Brigade have been recruiting the most dangerous outcasts from all three factions.”

At this, Creuserey’s lips curled in a self-satisfied grin. “We haven’t been *recruiting* them. We’ve been *using* them. Those wretched angels and fallen

angels are no more than tools to be wielded by us demons. Mutual understanding? Peace? Don't make me laugh! Only we demons deserve to flourish! The new world that we are forging will be *ours*! With Ophis's gift, we, the true Demon Kings, shall rule! Everyone else will be destroyed! You and the false Demon Kings are a hindrance to be swept away!"

Ah, this was bad. He was mouthing off like a typical small-fry mid-boss. Demonkind was already at risk of dying out, and he wanted to eradicate more of them...?

Sirzechs, I know you're conflicted over this, but you have to carry out your duty as a Demon King. Guys like Creuserey, remnants of the old regime, they've long since been on the path to their own destruction. Their beliefs, their values, will always be at odds with yours. There's no bridging that gulf.

Sirzechs's gaze was filled with sorrow. "Creuserey... All I want is to protect the future of our race. If we fail to safeguard our people, we will never prosper. You can call me naive if you wish, but I will lead our children into a bright new future. The underworld has no more need for conflict or war."

"How pathetic! Since when has *that* been the cherished desire of any demon?! We exist to lure the souls of humans to Hell and to destroy angels and God! I see now that there can be no reasoning with the likes of you! Sirzechs! You are no Lucifer! I will annihilate you and your hypocritical benevolence! You possess vast powers of destruction, and yet you haven't so much as raised a finger against the fallen angel standing right there beside you! What right have you to call yourself a Demon King?! No... I, Creuserey Asmodeus, a *true* Demon King, shall erase you!"

That outburst signaled an end to any discussions between the leaders of the old and new demon rulers.

Sirzechs turned to the Ouroboros Dragon. "...Ophis. Am I to assume that you aren't willing to negotiate, either?"

"Not unless you will consume my serpent and pledge yourself to me. I will also require you to relinquish control over the dimensional void surrounding the underworld."

In other words, she wanted obedience and the ability to close off the

underworld.

There was no way that a Demon King responsible for the well-being of the underworld would accept such terms.

Sirzechs glanced up at the sky before closing his eyes. When he finally opened them, they were filled with such frigid iciness that even I caught a chill.

Confirming this reaction, Creuserey retreated to a safe distance and gathered a huge mass of demonic energy in his hands.

“That’s it! Now we understand each other, Sirzechs!”

This was what he had wanted from the very beginning... Sirzechs, you never had any chance of getting through to him. Yet you still thought to give diplomacy a chance. You wanted to let him know how you felt and your plans for the underworld.

Sirzechs held out his right hand, turning it palm up.

He began to gather demonic energy of his own, his aura taking on a strange character.

It was his power of destruction.

“Creuserey,” he began, his voice echoing across the stage. “As a Demon King, I will eliminate any threat to the underworld.”

“How dare you! *You* are no Demon King!” Creuserey hurled the power gathered in his hands.

Sirzechs, however, didn’t recoil, instead shooting a myriad of small spheres.

Wh-whoosh!

Creuserey’s attack dissipated the instant it came into contact with Sirzechs’s.

Sirzechs’s orbs, however, continued to whirl through the air as if with a mind of their own, carving through Creuserey’s every counter. The few attacks that Sirzechs couldn’t eliminate, he handily evaded.

After a brief moment, one of those small orbs of destruction made its way into Creuserey’s mouth.

Blargh!

Creuserey's abdomen swelled up like a balloon. By the time it subsided, his demonic powers had been greatly weakened.

Did that attack just destroy the serpent that Ophis had given him?

"*Ruin Extinct*," Sirzechs muttered. "I've purged you of Ophis's serpent. Your power and strength will have returned to normal."

With the source of his great abilities snuffed, Creuserey's confidence similarly dried up. Worry crossed his face.

This was my first time witnessing Sirzechs's fighting abilities in person. One of the reasons he was chosen as Demon King was his overwhelming power. The man was capable of annihilating things so thoroughly that not even ash remained.

Although Sirzechs had only conjured up a few small globes, their effect was immense. He hadn't needed to pour his attention into them nor make them huge. He had produced a countless number of those miniscule projectiles, manipulating them all simultaneously.

"Damn you! You're no better than Vali! You Lucifers are blessed with such power, but all you ever do is get in the way!" Creuserey cursed as he lashed out again and again, launching more demonic energy.

Swoosh!

One of Sirzechs's destructive orbs brushed against Creuserey's abdomen, gouging a gaping hole through him. Even such a small strike was enough to deal considerable injury, destroying flesh on mere contact.

"...Wh-why...? How can I lose...against this fraud...?" Creuserey wept in despair, blood spewing down his chin.

Sirzechs closed his eyes and slowly brought his arm down to his side.

At that moment, another barrage of destructive spheres shredded Creuserey's body into nothingness.

Life.4

I Love You

At last, we arrived at the inner sanctuary, where we discovered what looked like a gigantic device of some kind.

It was embedded into the wall, a huge circular design fitted with jewels and engraved with strange patterns and glyphs.

Was this supposed to be some kind of magic circle?

As my eyes fell upon the center of that device, I cried out at the top of my lungs, "Asiaaaaaa!"

She was tied down in the middle of it! Thankfully, she didn't look injured, and her clothes weren't damaged. As far as I could tell, she was unharmed.

"You're finally here."

Diodora Astaroth emerged from behind the device. That meek smile of his only fanned the flames of my rage!

I started the countdown for my Balance Breaker. Once it activated, I would hit him with everything I had! At full force! I would shove my fist right through that bastard's face!

"...Issei?" Asia raised her head at the sound of my voice.

Her eyes were swollen.

She had been crying, and much harder than usual, judging by how red her eyes were. Faced with this sight, I reached a sickening realization.

"...Diodora, did you tell Asia everything?"

I was referring, of course, to what Freed had revealed to us earlier.

I had hoped that Asia would never have to learn the truth.

My inquiry prompted an amused smile from the young Astaroth. “Yes. We’ve gone over it all. Heh-heh-heh. I’ve been dying to show you. I’ll never forget her face when I revealed how everything was my doing. I even got it on video. Do you want me to play it for you? It really was splendid. No matter how many times I watch the agony of realization creep over the faces of fallen Church maidens, it never gets old.”

Asia began to sob.

“But it isn’t quite enough yet. She’s still holding on to hope. Yes, for all of you. Especially your vile Red Dragon Emperor. Your rescuing her utterly ruined my plan. That fallen angel—Raynare—was supposed to kill Asia, and then I would swoop in, dispatch the fallen angel myself, and resurrect Asia with an Evil Piece. Regrettably, I miscalculated. I assumed that even if you tried to interfere, you wouldn’t stand a chance against Raynare. But then I learned that you’re the Red Dragon Emperor. What an unlucky coincidence, no? Because of you, my schemes have been delayed far longer than I would have preferred. We’re finally back on track, though. Now I can enjoy Asia to my heart’s content.”

“Shut up.”

Even I could hardly believe how low my voice was.

Something about Diodora’s character had initially convinced me he was a petty villain. Instinct, perhaps. I couldn’t quite put my feelings into words, but I had always thought of him as similar to Riser.

That assessment had been proven wrong, however.

He was no petty villain—he had sunk far lower. Diodora was a fiend, pure evil!

What made him think that he could talk about love with Asia?!

I was even more infuriated than when Vali had threatened to murder my parents.

My sense of self-restraint was already at its limit, but that didn’t stop Diodora’s revolting soliloquy.

“Asia is still a virgin, yes? I like to break them in, you see. I would hate to have to settle for a hand-me-down from the Red Dragon Emperor.”

This man...

“Ah, but then again, maybe it could be fun to cuckold the Red Dragon Emperor?”

I’m going to hit him...

“Maybe I should take her by force while she cries out to you for help?”

“Shut uuuuuppppp!”

“Welsh Dragon: Balance Breaker!”

Something welled up inside me with explosive force!

“Diodoraaaaa! You...! You are the *one* person in life who I will never, *ever*, forgive!”

A red aura flared as my Scale Mail wrapped around my body.

Perhaps my Sacred Gear was responding to my emotions, as I had entered my Balance Breaker state without needing to wait for my two-minute countdown to reach its end!

“Prez, everyone! Please don’t interfere with this.”

Rias paused but ultimately said, “Issei, we should defeat him together... But it looks like there’s no stopping you... Give him hell, okay?”

I couldn’t have hoped for a better response. Yep, that was my plan exactly.

“Ddraig, can you hear me?” I called.

“What is it, partner?”

“Just for today, give me everything you’ve got. No holding back.”

“...Very well.”

Diodora chortled joyfully as he watched me prepare.

His body, too, was soon enveloped by a thick aura—his pitch-black.

“Ah-ha-ha-ha! Amazing! So *this* is the Red Dragon Emperor! But I’ve powered up as well, you know! With this serpent that Ophis gave me, I’ll kill you before you can so much as—”

Booooooooooom!

I ignited the propulsion unit on my back and blasted toward him!

Thump!

My fist slammed forcefully into Diodora's stomach before he could even finish his sentence.

"...Ghk."

Diodora bent over, his face contorting in agony.

It looked like he had been unable to respond to my speed. I pushed my fist deeper into his body, trying to crush his internal organs.

"Gagh..."

He vomited up blood—along with the contents of his stomach.

Only then did I pull back my fist. "You were going to kill me before what, exactly?"

Clutching his abdomen, Diodora staggered back. His confidence and self-assurance from a moment ago had vanished along with that smile of his.

"Gah! How dare you?! I'm a high-class demon! The brother of the current Beelzebub!" Diodora thrust his hand forward, casting a volley demonic energy bolts my way. "My noble blood will never succumb to a lowly, filthy, *obscene* reincarnated demon like you!"

The seemingly limitless projectiles rained down on me.

Nonetheless, I merely continued to step toward him without even moving to dodge the attacks. A simple brush of my hand was enough to push them aside, and those that I didn't block simply ricocheted harmlessly off my armor.

Thanks, Tannin. That grueling training you put me through has paid off. I thought this guy was supposed to be stronger than the prez, but his attacks aren't intimidating in the slightest.

"Indeed. Your practice with the Dragon King has toughened you up considerably. You may not have been able to make the most of that training in your battle against the Sitri Familia, but with no restrictions on you, you're free

to go all out. Your armor is noticeably more stable than during your last match, too.”

I couldn't have said it better myself, Ddraig. I hadn't been able to display my full power against Saji, but this time was different.

Against Diodora, I could unleash everything—with every intention of utterly destroying him.

“In terms of raw might, you’re right up there with the best of them now.”

As I drew closer to him, Diodora's attack let off as he tried to retreat to a safe distance.

Boooooom!

Once more, I activated the propulsion unit on my back, speeding toward him.

At that moment, he forged a multilayered defensive barrier with his powers.

“Vali’s was stronger than that.”

Smash!

I tore through it with ease.

Thud!

A blow to the face! I shoved my fist into him! Nothing could make me feel better right now than this!

Diodora was sent slamming against the ground by the force of the impact. Blood ran down his face, his eyes overflowing with anguish.

“...That hurt. That hurt, damn you! Why?! My strength should be unrivaled! Ophis was supposed to have enhanced it beyond belief!”

I lifted Diodora up into the air—and pouring my aura into my fist, punched him again! Another blow to the gut!

“Gah! Augh!”

And another one to the face! I wasn't finished yet! I poured energy into my hand and charged at that villainous bastard!

“I won't be defeated by a disgusting dragon like yooooouuuuu!”

Diodora hurriedly erected a thick shield.

Slam!

My punch collided with that barricade, the impact stopping it dead in its tracks.

This... What on earth is this?!

“Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! See that?! My demonic powers are infinitely stronger than yours! There’s no way a brute-force Red Dragon Emperor can defeat me!” Diodora broke out into manic laughter.

“You want a taste of real might?” I cried back, mercilessly charging the power of the Red Dragon Emperor!

“Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost!”

“Auuuuuggggghhhhh!”

The propulsion unit on my back converted my aura into raw fuel, forcing my fist into the barrier as hard as it would go.

Crack!

Small fissures formed in Diodora’s shield. And then—

Crash!

The entire thing shattered.

“Sorry about that. Brute force is all I have, so I can only push through headlong. Still, against someone like you, it’s more than enough.”

Diodora gulped audibly, his face turning deathly pale.

“Don’t you ever make Asia cry again!” I shouted, hurling my fist at him once more.

Snap!

My foe tried to block with his left hand, but I heard it break in response to the force of the momentum as my punch smashed past it and into his face!

Thump!

I sent it straight into that gloating mouth of his, sending him flying backward,

crashing into a distant pillar.

He fell limp to the ground for a few seconds before clawing back to his feet. “Impossible! I *won’t* be beaten! I defeated Agares! I’m going to crush Bael! I won’t lose to a useless Gremory! Your only redeeming feature is your endless affection! I am Diodora of the House of Astaroth!”

With that outburst, he held his hand aloft, summoning a group of pointed cone-shaped objects that he sent flying at me like missiles!

I wouldn’t be able to dodge all of them!

I crouched down and leaped to one side, but that was the limit of what I could do. I flicked away those projectiles that I could with punches and kicks, but they realigned themselves in midair as if they had minds of their own!

Slash!

They circled around me, seeking out the thinnest parts of my armor before skewering me with excruciating force.

Damn, but it huuuuurt! Diodora must have concentrated his demonic magic into the tip of those objects and used them to bore holes in my armor. He didn’t stand a chance fighting me head-on, so he’d resorting to this underhanded tactic...

However, I was far from finished! I grabbed ahold of those thornlike projectiles with both hands and yanked them from my body one by one!

My blood spilled out onto the floor.

Diodora, I noticed, was already preparing another wave of those missile things, so I activated my propulsion unit and raced toward him.

Crack...

A dull sound echoed through the sanctuary. My kick had made contact with Diodora’s right thigh and seemed to have snapped the bone clean in half.

“Arrrrrrggggghhhhh!”

Diodora’s face twisted in pain. He pointed his arm my way, rapidly gathering more demonic energy to it. He was probably trying to blast me back with as

much power as he could muster.

I raised my hands, concentrating my dragon aura into my palms!

Vrrrrrrrrrr!

A red flash of light coursed down my right arm just as Diodora loosed a concentrated explosion from his.

Booooooooooom! Our blasts collided in midair, pushing violently against each other.

No way was that going to stop me!

“Goooooooooooo!”

“Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost!”

The increased power flowed from my Sacred Gear, charging my Dragon Shot!

Kra-boom!

My Dragon Shot barreled through Diodora’s attack, grazing him and smashing into the far wall of the temple building.

Nonetheless, Diodora again concentrated his powers into his fists.

Booooooooooom!

I slammed my fist into the floor, the strike causing the entire temple to quake dangerously.

Diodora’s eyes twitched when he saw the massive crater. He trembled, his teeth chattering.

I had aimed my Dragon Shot to miss him on purpose. I should have finished him... Dammit. I was too softhearted...

Moving to stand before Diodora, I lifted him up into the air.

As I retracted the visor that masked my face, I glared at him with all the intensity of my seething aura. “You had better not come near Asia again! The next time you come anywhere near us, I’ll annihilate you once and for all!”

Diodora’s eyes betrayed his abject terror.

“Partner. He’s finished. You’ve crushed his spirit... Those are the eyes of

someone who has had the terror of a vengeful dragon engraved upon their soul."

...I know, Ddraig.

I released Diodora. He was quivering uncontrollably.

"Aren't you going to end him, Issei?" Xenovia asked, pointing Ascalon at Diodora.

Her gaze was so cold it could have frozen that bastard solid! This was bad. She seriously meant to kill him!

"He might come after Asia again. Wouldn't it be better to take his head here and now?"

She was serious. If either I or the prez were to agree with her, she would probably decapitate him in a heartbeat.

However, I shook my head. "...He's the brother of one of the current Demon Kings. Regardless of his involvement with those terrorists, if we kill him, it could cause problems for the prez or her brother. Look, he already knows he can't beat us."

The prez broke into a frown, closing her eyes in thought. She was clearly furious as well, but it appeared she was willing to leave Diodora's punishment to the demon leadership.

Xenovia looked somehow regretful, stabbing Ascalon into the ground. Doubtless, she'd been hoping to vent her anger on Diodora in some way. "...All right. If that's what you want, I'll stop. But I'd like to say one thing..."

"Yeah, me too," I added.

We both leveled our weapons at Diodora.

""Don't you ever so much as speak to Asia again!""

Diodora's head jolted up and down in agreement, his eyes glistening with horror.

With the threat dispatched, our attention turned to his captive.

"Asia!"

We all gathered around the strange device that held her.

“Issei!”

I gently stroked her head. “It’s all right, Asia. We’re here to save you. Ha-ha-ha, I told you, didn’t I? I’m here to keep my promise.”

Tears of relief began to course down her cheeks.

“It’s okay now. Once we get you out of here, we’ll escape to the basement and wait for Azazel and the others to come and get us.”

Kiba and the rest of the Familia began to fumble around the device holding Asia against the wall.

After a short moment, Kiba’s expression turned grave. “...I can’t free her from it.”

What?! That’s absurd! I pulled at the restraints myself, and yet...

“Dammit! They won’t come off!”

Not even with my boosted Red Dragon Emperor powers could I tear them loose!

We pooled our resources, trying to remove the shackles that restrained poor Asia’s limbs, but nothing, not Kiba’s Holy Demon Swords, Xenovia’s Holy Swords, or Akeno’s or the prez’s demonic powers could get her loose!

Even using the Boosted Gear to transfer my increased strength to Kiba’s blades wasn’t enough!

What *were* these bindings?! Why couldn’t we break her free?!

At that moment, Diodora spoke up, his voice faltering: “...It’s no use. That device can only be used once, and once activated, there’s no stopping it... Not until Asia herself uses her abilities.”

“What is *that* supposed to mean?” I demanded.

“It’s a unique barrier, made by a Longinus user,” Diodora explained through ragged breaths. “It’s the same technique that was used to make the field around the battle. Dimension Lost, the ultimate barrier-type Sacred Gear. It creates an infinitely unfolding mist around the user. It’s supposedly capable of

sealing anything inside and even transporting its target into an alternate dimension. In its Balance Breaker state, Dimension Create, it can forge devices like this from its vapors. Once initiated, it can't be stopped until the process concludes."

"What was this thing designed to do?" Kiba demanded. "What are its abilities?"

"...It was set to activate once I or one of the others gave the signal, or if I was defeated. As for what it does... It supercharges the abilities of the person in the center—Asia—and then reverses them."

Reverses them?

No way... Asia's healing abilities had been inverted during our match against the Sitri Familia. The effect had been...

Kiba must have realized what this meant, too, as he demanded, "What is its range?"

"...This entire battlefield and the VIP viewing lounge," replied Diodora.

We were all rendered speechless by this response! This was bad! The healing potential of Asia's Sacred Gear was enormous!

It was even capable of curing demons and fallen angels! If the Twilight Healing was amplified and reversed with the scope of its power encompassing the entire area...

"...Leaders from all the three great powers might be killed...!"

Everyone blanched at this shocking realization! If that happened, the safety of the human realm, Heaven, and the underworld would be in serious jeopardy!

"Did our match against the chairwoman give you this idea?!" I demanded.

Diodora shook his head. "...No, the Khaos Brigade has been toying with the idea for a while. But your fight against Sitri proved that it would actually work."

The prez's face twisted in anger. "A traitor from the fallen angels must have made sure to provide that ability to Sona as a field test!"

The House of Glasya-Labolas, Diodora, the Khaos Brigade, and our battle

against the Sitri Familia are all connected... Argh! And this device was made by another Khaos Brigade member equipped with a Longinus?! Ddraig, can't you do anything here? You're a Longinus, too, right?

"No. Dimension Lost is a higher-ranked Longinus than the Boosted Gear. Once it reaches its Balance Breaker state, it's all but unstoppable. Remember, there are other Longinuses more powerful than yours."

Why did such an overpowered person have to be a member of the Khaos Brigade?!

"...Ngh! What are we going to do...?!" I slammed the ground in frustration.

"Issei, you should destroy it, even if it means—"

"Don't say that! I don't want to hear that, not even from you, Asia!"

"B-but at this rate, Azazel and Michael will be... All because of me... I would rather—"

I put my hand on her shoulder and declared with absolute certainty, "I—I made a promise to you, Asia! Never to put you through pain like that again! I'll protect you! Whatever it takes, I'll do it!"

My vision blurred as tears ran down my face! Still, I was serious! I would keep her safe, no matter what!

"Issei..." Asia, too, began to weep.

I put on a smile and said to her, "That's why we're going home. Together. Mom and Dad are waiting for us."

Vrrrrrrrrrrr.

The device activated! Dammit! It was starting to move!

We threw all our demonic powers against it—Dragon Waves, magic blasts, you name it—but nothing would so much as cause a dent!

Asia's Sacred Gear looked to be affected by the contraption, too, her aura being drawn into the device.

Sure, it was higher-ranked than the Boosted Gear, but why did this Longinus have to be so strong?!

Wait, hold on... At that moment, an idea came to me. I looked over at Asia. *Right, it's directly attached to her.*

"Ddraig, I believe in you."

"What do you mean there, partner?" the dragon asked with suspicion.

I reached out to Asia's restraints.

If Ddraig's powers weren't enough by themselves, what if I used them to fuel one of my crazy delusions?

"Asia, I want to apologize in advance for this."

"Huh?" She tilted her head adorably to one side.

...This is all to save her. Sorry, Asia!

"Arise, my lust! My worldly passions! Dress Break! Balance Breaker Boosted Version!"

"Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost!"

The jewels embedded in my armor exploded with red light as my power flowed through my hand into the restraints that bound Asia.

I was imagining her naked body! Yes, as stark naked as the day she had been born! I had long since burned that image into my brain! Now, I summoned it up once more as blood spewed down my nose!

Her white, silky smooth skin! Her supple flesh! Beautiful! That delightful shade of pink! Her nipples!

And then...

Shatter...

There was the sound of metal breaking—and of clothes shredding!

As the bonds fettering Asia's limbs crumbled, her nun outfit was blown off, too!

"Kyah!" She bent down reflexively to cover herself.

Splurt!

That was the sound of blood spewing down my nose as I laid eyes on Asia's

radiant, still-maturing body.

Yep! Her breasts were just as glorious and bewitching as I remembered them!

Vrrrrr-vrrr-vrrr...

Likely because I had freed her from it, the device ground to a stop.

“Oh dear,” Akeno murmured, summoning a new set of clothing for Asia with her demon powers.

The next thing I knew, the prez was tapping on my armor. “How did you know your Dress Break ability would free her? Can that technique break through *anything* attached to a woman’s body?”

“I—I’m not entirely sure, but the bindings were clasped around her wrists and ankles, so I thought they might count as clothing as far as Dress Break was concerned. So I imagined her naked and focused everything I had on making her look that way. Maybe it wouldn’t work under normal circumstances, but I was in my Balance Breaker mode, and I boosted my powers as much as I could. Near as I can figure, I got lucky and found a loophole.”

It was an admittedly unconvincing argument, but that was the best I could come up with.

“Hmm. Maybe the strength of your fantasies helped as well,” Rias responded, tilting her head to one side in thought.

In any event, Asia was safe! I had destroyed the device!

Diodora was clearly disheartened! But we were all okay! My lustful delusions had saved my friends!

All right! Mission accomplished!

“Issei!”

“Asia!”

Fully clothed again, the blond beauty embraced me in a tight hug. If only I hadn’t been wearing my armor! Regardless, I was overjoyed to have her back!

“I knew you would come...,” she said.

“Of course. But I’m sorry it took so long. What he told you was horrible,

wasn't it?"

Surprisingly, Asia shook her head, her smile warm and enveloping. "I'm all right. I was shocked at first, but I have you now."

Ugh! What a sweet soul! Don't worry, Asia! I'll never let anyone marry you! I'll cherish you forever!

Xenovia was on the verge of tears, too. "Asia! Thank goodness! If I were to lose you..."

Asia helped wipe away her friend's tears. "I'm not going anywhere. Not with you and Issei protecting me."

"Yep! I'll be here for you! Always!" Xenovia declared with a nod.

Whoa, the friendship those two felt for each other was so moving... There was no way I would be able to hug Kiba like that.

"President, everyone, thank you for coming after me...", Asia said gently, bowing her head.

"Asia. You don't need to call me President all the time, all right? Not when we're in private. Think of me as your sister."

"— . Okay, Rias!"

Now Asia and the prez were embracing each other. What a moving scene!

"Yaaaaay! I'm so happy! Thank goodness you're back! Asiaaaaa!" Gasper was bawling his eyes out.

Ah, and Koneko was patting him on the head!

With the device destroyed, I hoped we'd be able to make our way home soon. Now that it was gone, everything should have been winding down. Maybe it was time for me to dispel my armor and retreat to the underground shelter with the others?

Then again, it would probably be best to keep it activated for as long as possible just in case there was another surprise lying in wait for us somewhere.

"Okay, Asia. Let's go home."

"Right! B-but I need to pray first." She put her hands together, offering her

thoughts up to the heavens.

“What are you praying for?” I asked.

“It’s a secret,” she answered bashfully.

Flash.

At that moment, a dazzling glow flooded down from above.

Asia was suddenly engulfed in a pillar of light. When that luminescence finally disappeared, she had vanished along with it.

“...Asia?”

Lord, will you hear my wish?

Please watch over Issei.

And also...

Let us keep on living happily together forever.

Juggernaut Drive

For a second, none of us knew what had just happened.

I turned it over a dozen times in my mind and still couldn't comprehend.

Issei had just defeated Diodora Astaroth, destroyed his Longinus device, and successfully rescued Asia. I—Yuuto Kiba—and the others had been about to leave.

Yet at that moment, Asia had vanished inside a pillar of blinding light.

What happened?

“So one Longinus can destroy the work of another, huh? That good-for-nothing mist-user, cutting corners. Looks like I'm going to have to change the plan.”

It was an unfamiliar voice that spoke.

I turned toward it and sighted a man I had never seen before floating in the air. He was dressed in light armor and a cloak.

The immensity of his aura sent a shiver deep into my core...

The president fixed the new arrival in her sights. “...Who are you?”

“This is our first time meeting, sister of the abominable false Demon King. I am Shalba Beelzebub—the true successor to the Demon King Beelzebub. Do not liken me to the kin of the pretender Demon King whom you fought moments ago. Diodora Astaroth... How dare you use Ophis's serpent in your match against the Agares girl without my permission... I should never have lent you my power. It is because of you that our enemies caught wise. You are the height of folly.”

The old Beelzebub!

Why now of all possible times?! It sounded like he was the mastermind that Azazel had mentioned earlier...

Diodora Astaroth was reduced to begging at the feet of the heir to the original Beelzebub. “Shalba! Help me! Now that you're here, we can kill the Red Dragon

Emperor! If the blood of the old and new Demon Kings work together—”

Squelch!

A beam of light shot out of Shalba’s hand, mercilessly tearing through Diodora’s chest.

“Pathetic. I told you all about that girl’s Sacred Gear, and you couldn’t even take it for your own. No wonder you’re so useless.” Shalba’s voice sounded disturbingly amused.

Diodora crumbled into dust before his body could even hit the floor.

Was that holy power? Like what angels and fallen angels wield? Had the Khaos Brigade been researching how to arm demons with it?

At that moment, I noticed a strange device attached to Shalba’s arm... Perhaps that was the source of the sacred light.

Then, did Asia...?

It looked like the others had come to that realization, too. Xenovia was literally trembling with rage.

“Now then, sister of Sirzechs. I know this is sudden, but it’s time for you to perish. I hope you understand why. We shall uproot the lineages of all your false Demon Kings.” Shalba’s tone was frigid, his eyes dyed with hatred.

His loathing for the current Demon Kings looked like it knew no bounds. To have his authority and nobility stolen away from him, not to mention his seat as a ruler, and to be driven into the depths of the underworld must have filled him with an unquenchable animosity.

“So now that you’ve murdered members of the Houses of Glasya-Labolas and Astaroth, you’re moving on to the Gremory clan?”

Shalba’s eyes narrowed in amusement at the president’s question. “Exactly. Your very existence is an affront to us. We, the true successors to what you imposters label the *old* demon regime, are loath to endure you.” Shalba let out a sigh. “Our plan ends here, however. We are defeated. What can I say? I never suspected that the Boosted Gear, a mere mid-tier Longinus, would triumph over Dimension Lost. But this mission *has* provided us with considerable data for

further endeavors. In that sense, at least, it was worthwhile. You may have killed Creuserey, but we can weather that loss. So long as *I* still stand, we can proceed—even without Vali. *That* is the power and majesty of the true Beelzebub... Now then, as my parting act, I will end your life, sister of Sirzechs.”

“You don’t have the gall to face the Demon Kings directly, so instead, you want to murder their families?! You’re cowards, all of you!” the president shot back.

“Not at all. First, we will make your false Demon Kings taste despair. *Then* we shall give them the annihilation that they deserve.”

“You’re a fiend! And worst of all, you’ve murdered Asia! I’ll never forgive you!”

The president was infuriated, her crimson aura flaring around her!

Akeno’s face similarly twisted in rage, her Holy Lightning crackling around her entire body.

I would never forgive this, either! Asia... She had finally been able to overcome her past! Her beloved Issei had helped her break free! And now it was over!

Joy and happiness had been within her grasp, only for this monster to snatch it away!

There could be no crime greater than murdering our precious companion! Shalba’s life wouldn’t even begin to make up for what he had so casually stolen, but I would destroy him all the same!

“Asia? Asia?” Issei stumbled forward, calling out her name. “Asia? Where are you? Hey, come on. We’re going home. Mom and Dad are waiting for us. Y-you’ve got to come out. H-ha-ha, you sure like to play around, don’t you...?”

Issei...

He was searching everywhere, his legs barely able to keep him upright...

“Asia? Let’s go home. No one’s going to hurt you anymore. If anyone so much as tries, I’ll thrash them! Come on, let’s go. Asia, we still haven’t done the three-legged race at the Sports Festival yet...”

I couldn't bear to watch.

Koneko and Gasper were both looking on in pain. Akeno averted her eyes, her cheeks damp with tears. The president reached out to hold Issei in a comforting embrace.



Grief was pooling within me...

“Prez, I can’t find Asia. We should finally be able to go home soon. We need to go hide in that underground place Teach mentioned. But without Asia... Mom and Dad said she’s like a daughter to them... And she thinks of them as her real parents, too... She’s so important to me, to all of us... She’s family...” Issei’s voice trailed off, his expression hollow.

The president stroked his cheek.

“...You! It’s unforgivable! I’ll kill you! I’ll carve you into oblivion!” Xenovia screamed, lashing out at Shalba with Durendal and Ascalon.

“How futile.”

Pshing!

Shalba raised a defensive barrier, effortlessly deflecting the two Holy Swords before hurling a blast of demonic power into her stomach.

Thud!

Xenovia crashed hard into the floor, her blades spinning through the air before stabbing into the ground where they landed.

“...Give her back... Asia...is my friend...! She’s kind...kinder than anyone else... So why...?!” Xenovia crawled across the ground, fumbling for her fallen blades.

Shalba turned to Issei. “A wretched reincarnated demon and a repulsive dragon. Your Gremory girl has bad taste indeed. Red filth, that girl of yours has been banished to the edge of all dimensions. She will already have ceased to exist... In other words, she’s dead.”

Issei’s gaze locked on to the floating Shalba.

He stared at him, unwavering. A strange shadow fell over his features. Completely expressionless, his vision seemed to bore into Shalba’s face.

“Rias Gremory—withdraw. If you want to live, leave this place at once.”

It was Ddraig’s voice. He had spoken so that we could all hear him.

Withdraw? What’s going on?

The president seemed just as confused, as she glanced my way with uncertainty.

Ddraig then addressed Shalba: *“You, demon. Shalba, was it?”*

Issei pushed the president away and rose to his feet.

“You...”

Lumbering like a dead man, Issei approached Shalba. Then, when he was almost beneath the floating demon, Ddraig’s voice—an emotionless sound that sent chills coursing through my body—sounded from Issei’s lips!

“You choose poorly just now.”

Boooooooooooooooooooooooooooooom!

The temple quaked violently around us as a bloodred aura swept over Issei, growing larger until it filled the entire inner sanctuary with a blinding crimson glow.

My skin tingled at the presence of such incredible power! Alarm bells were ringing in my head!

At that moment, a voice, practically a curse, poured from Issei’s lips.

And it wasn’t just his. No, there were a great many speakers combined, an unearthly, ominous mix of young and old, male and female.

“I have awakened...”

“It has begun.”

“It’s starting.”

“As the Heavenly Dragon who usurped God’s hegemony...”

“It’s always like this.”

“Yep, he never changes.”

“I scorn the infinite, lament the illusion...”

“Sought after by the world...”

“Rejected by the world...”

"It's always power."

"Time and time again, you choose annihilation!"

This was a dragon.

""""""""I shall plunge you into the frigid depths of the Hell of the Scarlet Lotus!""""""""

Boooooooooooooooooooooooooooooom!

"Gyarghhhhhhhhhh! Asiaaaaaaaaaa!"

Whoosh!

“Nghhhhhh!” Shalba cried out.

Crunch...

That was the sound of flesh rending.

“Curse you!”

Shalba forged a spear of light with his right arm, attempting to hurl it at Issei, but not before a dragon arm lashed out from one of the jewels embedded in that suit of armor, catching the attack before Shalba could follow through.

At that moment, a blade lanced from another of the gems, slicing Shalba’s arm clean off!

“Gah!” The demon’s face twisted in agony as blood splattered onto the floor!

Crunch!

Issei bit a chunk out of Shalba’s shoulder with a sickening sound before descending back to the floor.

After landing, he spat the gory mass out onto the ground. The blood seeped into his red armor, giving off a nauseating sheen.

“Gyagugagh! Gyugagh! Gwaaaaauuuuuggggghhhhh!”

Issei’s voice had already lost all semblance of humanity... From each burning jewel studding his armor, a dragon’s arm or a needlelike blade jutted forth. He was looking less and less like a person by the second.

“Who do you think you’re messing with?!”

Enraged, Shalba descended to the ground, releasing a blast of brilliant light from the palm of his remaining hand!

Suddenly, the Red Dragon Emperor’s wings burned with a pale luminescence, a terrific glow almost identical to that of the White Dragon Emperor!

Just before Shalba’s beam found purchase...

“Divide! Divide! Divide! Divide! Divide!”

As that voiced echoed through the ruined sanctuary, the light of Shalba’s attack diminished in size until it became no more substantial than a laser pointer.

This was the White Dragon Emperor’s signature ability, which Issei had stolen from him during their battle! To think that he could use it to this high level!

“Vali’s powers?! Where did you...?! How many times must you stand in my

way, Valiiii?!”

Shalba let out a furious cry, yet this time, it wasn't a beam of light that he unleashed, but a wave of demonic energy coursing toward Issei!

Swoosh!

Nonetheless, Issei diverted the oncoming barrage with a mighty flap of his dragon wings.

—!

He brushed aside such an overwhelming attack so easily!

Hold on, does Shalba Beelzebub have a grudge against Vali?

Perhaps the descendants of the original Beelzebub and Lucifer were naturally hostile toward each other.

As I pondered that, Issei underwent another transformation.

The gaping maw in his helmet had opened wide, revealing what looked like a laser cannon in the back of his mouth! And it was lit up!

Pssssshhhhh!

A crimson beam shot from Issei's mouth, racing toward Shalba and severing his left arm. It didn't stop there, however, carving a line through the wall, floor, and ceiling.

Booooooooooom!

A tremendous explosion sounded in the distance! There was smoke and dust everywhere.

“Nghhhhh!”

As Issei let out an ear-rending scream, his power swelled around him, tearing a massive crater in the ground. The energy's mere presence was reducing the foundation of the temple to ash.

“Y-you monster! You freak! Th-this is your Juggernaut Drive?! Impossible! O-Ophis's serpent should have supercharged my abilities! I should have surpassed anything the Boosted Gear was capable of!”

Shalba's arrogance and confidence had given way to fear. His eyes were white with panic as he stared across at Issei in abject horror.

The only thing we could do was watch in stunned silence.

The prez was wide-eyed, her whole body shaking. Akeno, Xenovia, Koneko, and Gasper all watched Issei with dread plain on their faces. I couldn't stop trembling, either.

That thing wasn't Issei anymore. We were staring at a real-life monster.

Issei, or rather, the Red Dragon Emperor, adjusted his posture, spreading his wings as he leveled his gaze at Shalba.

There was a mechanical sound of something sliding into place—the armor surrounding Issei's chest and body opened up as the barrel of a launcher emerged.

Vrrrrrrrrrr...

With a dull vibrating noise, Issei's red aura gathered into the barrel of that cannon, intensifying as it compressed into a single deadly mass...

With his wings outstretched to either side, his ominous crimson energy swelled.

"Guh! I can't die here!"

Shalba tried drawing a magic circle on the ground with his feet—when his legs suddenly stopped.

"...Y-you've frozen them?! I can't move!"

The eyes on the Red Dragon Emperor's armor were burning.

Did it just use something similar to the ability of Gasper's Sacred Gear?! How much is this creature capable of?!

"Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost! Boost!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Longinus Smasher!!!!!!!!!"

That voice, emanating from the Red Dragon Emperor's Sacred Gear, echoed through what remained of the temple.

At that moment, the incomprehensible mass of energy gathered into its cannon erupted!

This was bad! At this rate, we would all be dragged into the destruction!

“President! We should fall back! We need to leave the temple!”

“Issei... I...”

The president began to stumble toward the dragon monster that was our friend, but I grabbed her arm.

“I’m sorry for this!”

I lifted her up and began to run. Akeno lent Xenovia her shoulder as she raced after us, followed by Koneko and Gasper!

“I-impossible...! I am the true heir to the blood of an original Demon King! I still haven’t put Vali in his place! Beelzebub has always been superior to Lucifer! Cursed dragons! Red and white alike!”

Booooooooooooooooooooooooooom!

Shalba, along with the entire temple complex, was swallowed in the surge of red light.



“Ugh...”

Once we had made our way out of the temple, I summoned a vast collection of Holy Demon Swords to serve as a makeshift shelter and urged everyone inside.

When the sound of the temple collapsing around us had faded, I released the blades and surveyed our surroundings.

The temple complex had been reduced to rubble.

The device forged by the other Longinus still remained, but it was full of cracks, with various parts broken clean off...

Is the Red Dragon Emperor truly this powerful...?

“Augghhhh...!

Issei was standing in the center of the wreckage, sending a sorrowful roar up

into the heavens.

Even if he had lost his sense of identity, he still grieved for Asia.

Shalba Beelzebub and Diodora Astaroth were nowhere to be seen. The fight should have been over, yet Issei's armor showed no sign of deactivating.

...What should we do? I wondered. How could I return Issei to his senses? It seemed there was little any of us could do, save watch in sorrow.

"Looks like you're in a bit of a bind down there."

Another voice?

A rift opened above us, from which Vali, the White Dragon Emperor, emerged.

Behind him came another figure, wearing what looked like ancient Chinese armor. This was my first time meeting the second individual in person, but I recognized Bikou, the descendent of the legendary Sun Wukong, at once.

Lastly, a third entity arrived—an unfamiliar guy dressed in a business suit. The sword in his hands possessed an incredible radiant aura, the likes of which I had never before set eyes upon. I realized what it was immediately—the Holy King Sword, Collbrande. That meant this was the man that Issei had encountered a short while back.

"Vali." The president was startled at this sudden entry, but she quickly adopted a combat stance.

The rest of us did likewise, but there was no sense of hostility coming from the three.

"I'm not here to fight, just to observe the Red Dragon Emperor's Juggernaut Drive. Too bad it's incomplete. You're lucky he initiated it within an artificial battlefield. If he had done this in the human realm, he could have destroyed an entire city."

"...Is there some way to make him go back to normal?" the president asked Vali.

"Seeing as it isn't his complete Juggernaut Drive, you might be able to reverse it. At this rate, he'll shave away his life force until there's nothing left. In any

event, the longer he's like this, the greater the danger he's in."

So I was right, Issei *was* in danger...

Bikou suddenly approached me. In his arms, he was cradling a young woman.

"Here, she's part of your group, right? Your healer."

That face...

"Asia!"

The president, Akeno, and the others all hurried to gather around her. From what I could tell, she didn't look injured. She was unconscious...but breathing!

"She's alive!" I cried out.

Everyone, including me, teared up at this joyful revelation! Thank goodness! She was okay!

"But how...?" I muttered in disbelief.

It was the wielder of the Collbrande who responded to my question. "We were investigating an entrance into the dimensional void around here when we spotted her falling into it. Vali said he recognized her, so we picked her up and brought her back. Quite lucky, that one. Had we not been there, she would have perished."

So that was it... Whatever the circumstances, I was simply relieved that she was safe.

"Asiaaaaa!"

Having made sure her friend was all right, Xenovia fell to the ground and wept. I set Asia down beside her, letting her cradle the other girl in her arms.

"Now, all we need to do is help Issei." The president glanced back toward him as he howled in despair. "Will he return to normal once we tell him that Asia's okay?"

Vali shook his head. "It's risky. You would get yourself killed. But I certainly won't stop you if you'd like to try."

Akeno and Koneko each approached him.

“I know we’re in no position to ask this, but can *you* help him? Surely you, the White Dragon Emperor, can help bring him back?”

“...Please. We’ll do everything we can to help you. Whatever it takes to save him...”

It was clear that they both cared deeply about Issei.

I had been confident that Vali would refuse, yet he rested his hand on his chin, sinking deep into thought. “Hmm. Maybe if we could stimulate his mind...”

“Couldn’t we just show him some boobs?” Bikou suggested, scratching the back of his head.

The same idea had occurred to me, too, but I’d hesitated to verbalize it so directly.

“Not when he’s like this. The best way to calm a dragon is through song... But there have never been any songs for the Red or White Dragon Emperors.”

“But there is!” interrupted a voice as a white-winged angel descended from above—Irina Shidou.

“Wait, that’s Issei?! I heard what happened from Archangel Michael and Azazel, but it’s that bad?!”

Though clearly surprised, Irina was nonetheless as spirited as ever.

“What are you doing here, Irina?” Xenovia questioned.

Immediately, the newly arrived reincarnated angel pulled out a holographic projector, the kind frequently used by demons.

“The leaders in the viewing room and out on the battlefield already know that Issei went berserk, so Lucifer and Azazel had me bring this secret weapon! By the way, Odin was the one who helped me get here! He’s incredible! A Norse god! And his beard is so *huge*!”

Her level of excitement was almost enough to break through the direness of our situation.

The president took possession of the projection equipment, setting it up on the ground. “I don’t really get it, but if my brother and Azazel think it can work,

then it's worth a shot." So saying, she took a deep breath and pushed the button on the side of the device.

A huge holographic image appeared overhead.

Its abrupt appearance seemed to catch Issei's attention, too.

What unfolded next was beyond my wildest expectations.

"Breast Dragon! Let's...go!"

An image of Issei in his Balance Breaker armor appeared up above—surrounded by countless young children.

"Breasts!" they called out around him in unison.

With that, a lively tune began to play as the projection of Issei and the children started dancing.

Letters appeared—a title and lyrics.

Everyone watching went bug-eyed.

What on earth is this?

"The Song of the Breast Dragon"

Lyrics: Aza-Zel

Composition: Sirzechs Lucifer

Dance Choreography: Serafall Levia-tan

He's out there in a far-off land,

Waiting for the sun to shine!

When it comes out, he searches far and wide,

Till he finds what's on his mind!

Dragon! Dragon! Breast Dragon!

Squeeze 'em! Suck 'em! Breast Dragon!

They come in every shape and size,

But he loves big ones most of all!

Breast Dragon! Soar!

He's down there in that far-off town,

Laughing all day long!

'Cause rain or thunder, it won't stop him,

From touching what he loves!

Dragon! Dragon! Breast Dragon!

Poke 'em! Stroke 'em! Ooooooh!

He's seen so many, he knows for sure,

He loves big ones most of all!

Breast Dragon! Go!

.....

To say we were dumbfounded would be an understatement. None had the faintest clue how to react.

After a short moment, I recognized this for what it was. It had undoubtedly been recorded back when we had visited the television station in the underworld. This was what Issei had filmed during his private session.

And that title! “The Song of the Breast Dragon!”

They had gone to the trouble of having him activate his Balance Breaker and dance alongside small children. I was floored. Let's not forget the credits, which gave away those responsible...

What were they thinking?!

This was ghastly.

“...Ugh, breasts...”

Issei was holding his head in his hands, but my ears hadn't deceived me! He had just uttered a comprehensible word! But why *breasts*?!

“He's listening!” the president exclaimed with tears of joy.

“...Why is he only responding to that...?” Koneko...looked crestfallen.

“Shidou, play it again!” instructed the president.

“Yep! Leave it to me!” Irina answered, pushing the button on the projector once more.

*He's out there in a far-off land,
Waiting for the sun to shine!
When it comes out, he searches far and wide,
Till he finds what's on his mind!
Dragon! Dragon! Breast Dragon!
Squeeze 'em! Suck 'em! Breast Dragon!
They come in every shape and size,
But he loves big ones most of all!
Breast Dragon! Soar!*

“Ugh, breasts... I wanna touch them...squeeze them...” Issei groaned, still grasping his head in his hands.

*He's down there in that far-off town,
Laughing all day long!
'Cause rain or thunder, it won't stop him,
From touching what he loves!
Dragon! Dragon! Breast Dragon!
Poke 'em! Stroke 'em! Ooooooh!
He's seen so many, he knows for sure,
He loves big ones most of all!
Breast Dragon! Go!*

“I—I wanna feel them... Ugh... Suck them...”

Issei's fingers were making some sort of gesture in the air! His razor-sharp claws had disappeared!

“This might just work...”

“Vanishing Dragon: Balance Breaker!!!!!!”

Vali activated his Balance Breaker, a suit of glistening white armor immediately enveloping him as he flew through the air toward Issei with incredible speed!

“Divide!” The White Dragon Emperor’s voice boomed. And as it did so, Issei’s aura shrank considerably.

There was no mistaking it. Vali must have touched Issei as he flew past and had activated his ability. It wouldn’t have been possible just a short time ago, but Issei seemed to be slowly returning to his senses thanks to that song.

“Rias! Your nipples are what he needs now!” Akeno cried out.

“Huh?!” The president’s eyes all but shot out of their sockets at this suggestion.

However, Akeno wasn’t finished: “He unlocked his Balance Breaker by pushing his fingers into your chest, so it should be able to have the opposite effect here as well. It would have been insane to approach him while he was going berserk like that, but he’s starting to come around now!”

“B-but can my breasts really dispel his Juggernaut Drive...?”

“Of course they can! Mine won’t do the trick... Heh-heh-heh, as I feared, you’re better suited for this role... I’m a little jealous, you know?”

If anything, Akeno’s expression was one of sadness.

I had no idea how to respond to all this. Breasts this, tits that... It was absurd.

The president stole a glance toward Vali, but the White Dragon Emperor averted his gaze. Judging by the sweat building on his forehead, he had pushed himself hard and didn’t want to get involved any further. I couldn’t blame him!

Bikou was pressing his hands against his stomach as if trying to hold in his laughter.

Oh, go ahead. How else are we supposed to respond to this? Issei, how boob-obsessed can you be?!

The president stepped forward, looking as if she had made up her mind. “All right.” She proceeded toward Issei without even the slightest hesitation in her step!

Are you really okay with this, President?! Is it me, or have you been willing to do anything for him lately?!

The song continued to loop as she drew closer to him until, at last, she stood directly before our transformed friend. Then she began to unbutton her blouse.

Don't worry, President, none of us can see you from back here...

“M-my...b-breasts...,” Issei murmured, having found what he was looking for, and he reached out to her with trembling fingers.

Meanwhile, the song continued to play.

Dragon! Dragon! Breast Dragon!

Poke 'em! Stroke 'em! Ooooooh!

He's seen so many, he knows for sure,

He loves big ones most of all!

Breast Dragon! Go!

The next instant, Issei's armor deactivated.

“...Rias Gremory...are your breasts like an on-off switch for him?” Vali asked with complete sincerity.

Bikou, meanwhile, continued to guffaw. “Hey, that ain't a proper thing to ask!”

I didn't know what to think anymore.

Issei, you really are a full-fledged Breast Dragon...

Life.5

The Great Red!

“Nnn... Huh? What happened?”

When I woke up, my Balance Breaker was gone. The prez and Akeno embraced me tearfully, leaving me wondering what had occurred while I'd been out.

I couldn't recall it properly at all, but according to Kiba, I had gone berserk and defeated that Shalba guy. It was all a blur to me.

Hold on, is that Asia who Xenovia's hugging?! How?!

Perhaps noticing my disbelieving expression, Kiba explained. “Vali rescued her.” He pointed to the individual in question.

Ah, so Vali is here, too... Why? Hold on, is he grinning?

When I asked for an explanation, I learned that it had all been a series of fortunate coincidences.

All I really cared about was that Asia was safe.

“Asia! Asia!” I cried out to her.

She slowly opened her eyes. “...Huh...? Issei?”

She was okay! Thank goodness! My Asia!

Thud!

Just as I was about to embrace her in a hug, Xenovia knocked me away!

“Asia!” she called, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“X-Xenovia. What's wrong? I—I can't breathe...”

“Asia! Asia, Asia, Asia, Asia, Asia! I'll always be your friend! Forever! So don't leave me ever again!”

Asia gently stroked her head. "...Yes, we'll always be friends."

"Thank goodness." Standing beside me, Irina nodded, her own eyes moist.

I guess this means case closed, then? I breathed a sigh of relief.

No sooner had I done so than Vali called out to me. "Issei Hyoudou. It looks like you've pulled through."

"Yeah. Guess I owe you one."

"Heh, don't worry about it. Anyway, it's about time. Look up."

"...?"

My curiosity piqued, I turned my gaze to the white sky hanging over the empty battlefield.

R-rip!

A gigantic hole formed above us, and there was something beyond it—a figure.

"That's..."

When I realized what I was looking at, my mouth hung open in shock. The prez and the others appeared to be equally stunned.

Vali's lips curled in a smirk. "Watch closely, Issei Hyoudou. That's what I came here to see."

A huge crimson dragon floated overhead, moving majestically across the heavens.

It was enormous! Much, much larger than Tannin! It had to be at least a hundred meters long!

"There are two entities known as the Red Dragon. The first is the one that dwells in you—the Welsh Dragon, the Red Dragon Emperor. The White Dragon Emperor appears in the same legends and myths. But there is another Red Dragon, an entity that appears in the Book of Revelation."

"The Book of Revelation...?"

"The Great Red. Although he's known by other names, too. Maybe you've

heard of the Apocalypse Dragon, the True Red Dragon, or DxD—the Dragon of Dragons? He resides in the dimensional void, where he has been soaring for eternity. We came here today to witness that for ourselves. These battlefields for your Rating Games are forged by raising barriers on the edge of the dimensional void. Ophis’s true aim today was to use this place to stare into that expanse. Shalba’s scheme was never of any importance to her or us.”

“But what’s he doing in there?” I asked.

“Who knows? There are a lot of theories... *He* is Ophis’s true goal—and the opponent I hope to defeat.”

Vali’s opponent...?

His eyes looked more genuine than I had ever seen before.

“The enemy I wish to face most of all... The Great Red, the Apocalypse Dragon... I hope to become the True White Dragon. It’s hardly fair that White is always a level below Red, don’t you think? Once I defeat him, I’ll reach that ultimate rank.”

So that’s Vali’s aim...

Well, everyone had a dream of their own, and that was his. Basically, his reason for joining that terrorist organization was to fight a massive dragon.

I had known that he must have been doing all those bad things for a purpose, but now that I knew what it was, his actions were borne home to me all the more.

“How long it has been, Great Red?”

—!

A small black-haired girl in a dress had appeared out of nowhere, not too far from us.

“Who’s that...? She wasn’t there before,” I wondered aloud.

Vali flashed me a grin. “That’s Ophis. The Ouroboros. The head of the Khaos Brigade.”

Seriously?! She’s the head honcho?! What’s she doing here herself?! Please

don't say she wants to fight me!

The girl—Ophis—lifted her hand into the air, pointing toward the Great Red with a finger gun gesture.

“I shall take that silence for my own, one of these days.”

Swoosh.

Wings flapped.

Thud!

Something came slamming into the ground!

What now?! I thought. Fortunately, I recognized these latest arrivals. It was Azazel and Tannin!

“Teach! Tannin!”

“Ah, Issei, you’re back to normal now. I was afraid to see what you might end up doing, but I always suspected that song and the thought of breasts would be enough to cancel out your Juggernaut Drive. It was boobs that helped you unlock your Balance Breaker, after all. Geez, you’re as predictable as they come. I guess this makes writing that little tune worth it, huh?” said Azazel.

That theme had basically been the stuff of my dreams, but I couldn’t deny that it was awful!

“Just so you know, that was Sirzechs’s idea. He and Serafall were so excited about it that they even came up with the score choreography themselves.”

I was taken aback to learn that it had been a joint production between the leaders of demonkind and the fallen angels.

Tannin seemed to find it just as amusing as I did. “Ha-ha-ha, as expected of our breast-loving Red Dragon Emperor! And would you look at that, I guess this is what happens when you chase after Ophis.”

Both Azazel and Tannin were gazing up at the Great Red.

“It certainly brings back memories. The Great Red...,” the latter remarked.

“Have you fought him before or something?” Azazel asked Tannin.

The dragon, however, shook his head. “No. He never spared me so much as a second thought.”

Not even Tannin stands a chance against that Great Red...? Just how powerful is he...?

“It’s been a while, Azazel,” Vali called. “I’m guessing you beat Creuserey Asmodeus, then?”

“Ah, Sirzechs was the one who dealt with the old Asmodeus... Once the leaders were taken care of, their subordinates were quick to flee. I heard that Issei eliminated Shalba Beelzebub while in his Juggernaut Drive.”

“My brother?” the prez questioned.

“Once the barrier was down, he went back to the viewing lounge,” Azazel replied before turning to the small girl-like figure still loitering nearby. “Ophis. The followers of the old demon regime have all either surrendered or been defeated. Now that their bosses are gone, they’re essentially finished as a unified faction.”

“Yes, I’ve supposed as much already.” Ophis didn’t seem shocked or disappointed in the slightest. Didn’t it bother her that she’d lost?

Azazel shrugged at that response. “Apart from Vali and his people, the only other group of note with you guys was that band of Sacred Gear users, right? The ones descended from famous humans. What are they called again? The Hero Faction?”

The Hero Faction? So there are still other forces within the terrorist organization? Ah, right. The Khaos Brigade’s whole deal is that it’s made up of a ragtag assortment of dangerous individuals from a great many places...

“Now then, Ophis. Do you want to go?” Azazel pointed his radiant spear toward the girl.

Was he about to start trading blows with the big bad?

Ophis, however, turned her back to him and stated, “I’m going home.”

Evidently, she didn’t want to fight.

Nonetheless, the people on our side weren’t convinced by that display of

indifference.

Tannin pulled his wings back, shouting after her. “Stop, Ophis!”

Yet the girl’s face twisted in an ominous smile. “Tannin. The Dragon Kings are gathering together once more. This should be fun.”

Swoosh!

A faint vibration shook the air, and Ophis completely vanished.

Ah, she escaped!

Both Azazel and Tannin let out exasperated sighs.

“It’s time for us to leave as well.” Now it was Vali’s turn. He was just about to enter a spatial rift that his suit-wearing companion had opened.

Seriously, they were all too quick to skedaddle!

“Issei Hyoudou... Do you want to defeat me?”

“...Sure. But you aren’t the only one I want to beat. I want to surpass Kiba, and then there’s my buddy Saji. There’s a whole lot of things I hope to overcome.”

“I could say the same. I have another target besides you. It’s strange, isn’t it? The current Red and White Dragon Emperors have other things on their minds more important than their fated confrontation. Maybe you and I are outliers when it comes to dragons. It’s nice to have a diversion every now and then... But I assure you, one day we *will* do battle.”

I raised my fist to Vali. “Yeah, let’s settle it. I’ll never let you halve the prez’s or Akeno’s breasts.”

“You’re an interesting one... Get stronger, Issei Hyoudou.”

“See ya, Breast Dragon! You too, Switch Princess!”

Guh! That grin of Bikou’s never failed to rile me up!

Hold on, Switch Princess?

Looking to the prez, I saw she was turning bright red. What was going on?

“Yuuto Kiba, Xenovia,” the suited man said to our two sword wielders. “I am

the heir to Arthur Pendragon. This here is the Holy King Sword. Please call me Arthur. I expect to cross blades with you both one day. Until then.”

With that, Vali and his companions disappeared into the spatial rift.

For a second, I thought about following them—but they *had* just saved Asia.

Had Vali done so on a whim? I had no way of knowing. In any event, I had no desire to fight him here. One day I would. We would certainly meet again, and I had to be ready.

I took Asia’s hand and flashed her a warm smile. “It’s time to go home, Asia. For real this time.”

“Right. Mom and Dad are waiting for us,” she replied.

As I beheld Asia beaming at me, I slipped into unconsciousness.

[Vali Lucifer](#)

“Vali, I’ve heard from the bosses. That Shalba jerk was near death, but it looks like he’s gonna pull through.”

“I see. He’s always been hasty. Everything’s do or die with him. Just like our ancestors, chased into exile by the current demon government. Always trying to rush things.”

“Apparently, everyone over in the old demon group wants you to be their new leader. What are you gonna do?”

“Tell them I’m fine in my current position. I don’t desire any more duties than I already have as an heir to one of the original Demon Kings.”

“Ah, then I guess they’re done for. The other factions are already racing to take the top billing.”

“Katerea, Creuserey, Shalba—they all sought more than they could ever hope to manage. If you’re going to adopt the title of a former Demon King, you need to act with the dignity and pride that it commands.”

“So why did you help the Red Dragon Emperor and that healer girl of his? That wasn’t like you.”

“I was bored. That’s all.”

New Life

“H-hmm...”

When I opened my eyes, I was in my bedroom.

Huh? What happened? I beat Diodora, met Vali, and then...what?

It felt like I had fallen unconscious several times over...

“Are you awake?”

I turned my head to the sound of that voice—and found the silver-haired maid Grayfia watching over me.

A crimson-haired boy was standing beside her—Millicas. He was staring my way.

“Issei’s opened his eyes, Mom!”

“Master Millicas, what have I told you about calling me that in front of others?”

“Hmph. If you say so.”

When I sat up, Grayfia passed me a glass of water.

“Ah, thanks.”

As I sipped the drink, Grayfia activated some kind of small holographic device.

Huh? What now?

A three-dimensional projection of a man appeared above it—Sirzechs. He was dressed in unusually casual clothing. Had he sneaked out somewhere?

“Ah, Issei. You’re finally awake.”

“Y-yep!”

“Good work. I know it was hard, but thanks to you and Rias, we’ve managed to contain the followers of the old demon regime for the time being.”

According to Sirzechs, I had slipped into a coma of sorts after the battle and hadn’t woken up for several days.

My Juggernaut Drive must have taken a considerable toll on my body.

Apparently, I couldn’t freely adopt that bestial form whenever I wanted. But frankly, that sounded like it was for the best.

“Azazel spoke to Ddraig a few times while you were sleeping. It sounds like your anger exploded past a certain tipping point when you thought you had lost Asia, releasing the sealed power within you.”

So that was it. It was my uncontrollable fury that had triggered that transformation.

Wait, Ddraig was still able to communicate while I was asleep, was he?

“In that state, your powers could even surpass those of God or us Demon Kings, albeit only temporarily. But entering that state reduces your life span considerably. You should refrain from using it again. Your death would cause a great deal of sorrow. My sister would certainly be crushed...”

“Yes. I understand.”

I couldn’t remember exactly what I had transformed into, but I certainly didn’t want to go through that again.

There would be no point to anything if I died. Maybe I had only gone berserk because I thought Asia was dead, but even so, I didn’t want to experience that again.

Sirzechs also informed me that the followers of the old demon regime in the Khaos Brigade had fallen into disarray after losing their leaders.

Vali, despite himself being descended from one of the former Demon Kings, had apparently expressed no interest in accepting their offer of leadership. According to Sirzechs, they were essentially finished as a meaningful fighting force. The surviving remnants had either surrendered or fled deep into the darkness.

The Astaroth family had lost all credibility now that Diodora's actions had come to light. The fact that their next heir had been secretly aligned with the Khaos Brigade hung heavily over their name, and the present head of the family had been forced to relinquish his title and authority.

For the time being, the House of Astaroth had similarly lost the right to have any of its members be considered as future Demon Kings.

The current Beelzebub hadn't escaped being held at least partly responsible, either. However, it sounded like he had been part of the group that had been attacked by the Khaos Brigade and had fought the terrorist group alongside the other three Demon Kings.

On top of that, the other Demon Kings had all thrown their support behind him, so cries for him to take responsibility for the actions of his family had subsided somewhat.

"Losing Ajuka Beelzebub right now would be a bitter blow for all demons at present. His technical mastery is vital to our future programs. He was the one who devised the basic theory underlying the Rating Game. We won't find anyone else of a similar caliber." Sirzechs breathed out a sigh.

From what I gathered, there was a critical shortage of vital personnel in demon society.

Maybe it was because I was the Red Dragon Emperor that Sirzechs went on to tell me about Ouroboros. But that explanation only raised further questions.

"Can I ask you something?"

"And what would that be?"

"Ophis... The head of the Khaos Brigade... Her goal is to get rid of that huge dragon, the Great Red, so she can return to the dimensional void, right? So if we help her, won't she stop supporting the terrorists?"

Sirzechs shook his head. *"No. Unfortunately, that would be unwise. The prevailing theory at present is that the dimensional void is in equilibrium with the various planes of existence precisely because the Great Red resides within it. If Ophis—or Vali, for that matter—were to slay him and rule over it themselves, there's no telling what would happen to our world. We might have been able to*

trust the old Ophis, but she's changed too much."

That certainly sounded serious, a breakdown of the stability between the dimensional void and the various planes of existence...

Why did Ophis and Vali have to set their sights on something so risky?! No wonder the leaders of each of the major factions were worried! Ngh... There may have been a chance that I could defeat Vali one day in the future, but what about Ophis? I didn't want to have to be the one to fight her!

All I really wanted was to become a high-class demon and rule over a harem!

"We will need to reconsider our plans for future Rating Games between our up-and-comers. We can't afford to allow terrorists to interfere again."

"So are the matches canceled, then?" I asked.

"We will probably have to start over from scratch. But there is one match that I very much look forward to seeing. A great many people here in the underworld, and quite a few among the other powers, await it eagerly."

"Which match is that exactly?"

"The one between Rias and Sairaorg."

—!

Were people really looking forward to a confrontation between the prez and Sairaorg, the number one demon youth, that much?!

Sairaorg's words echoed in my mind. *"I look forward to facing your extraordinary power myself."*

If things hadn't been interrupted, he would've been our next opponent.

"There's a great deal of anticipation for the match between Sitri and Agares, too... I suppose it would be Power versus Power and Technique versus Technique."

Sirzechs certainly did sound as if he were excited. Heck, knowing him, he definitely was.

"In any event, we've asked you all to wait until we weigh up the situation and decide how best to proceed."

Undoubtedly, the higher-ups needed a bit of time to sort things out, given that they had just suffered another terrorist attack. If they weren't careful, public opinion in the underworld might oppose holding more Rating Games at all.

On a brighter note, it sounded like the Breast Dragon had become incredibly popular with kids in the underworld.

"I'm thinking about writing a second song. Heh-heh-heh, I always dreamed of being a musician back when I was a child. You don't know how happy I am that I've been able to make that dream come true."

Sirzechs's eyes were positively sparkling. Evidently, he'd poured his passion into that work.

Suddenly, his tone turned serious: *"You're amazing, Issei."*

"I—I am...?"

"Yes. Children are the smallest demographic among viewers of the Rating Game. Strictly speaking, viewers their age are practically nonexistent. Watching adults fight each other is hardly entertainment as far as they're concerned. To tell you the truth, the only matches of any interest to them are those between certain reincarnated demons—dragons like Tannin or non-human creatures and the like. They probably think of those matches as kaiju movies."

Ha-ha-ha, *kaiju* films, huh? Tannin did kind of resemble the kind of creature you'd see on the screen.

"I would be overjoyed if our future generations could look up to you—even if just during your bouts."

"Are you asking me to be a kind of superhero for kids?"

"Yes. I won't force it on you, but I would appreciate it greatly."

I didn't really understand the full importance of the Rating Game in the underworld... But if it was for the sake of the children...

"That's the Breast Dragon!"

"The Breast Dragon Emperor!"

The faces of the kids who had cried out in joy back when I had done my interview flashed before my eyes.

Part of me was getting excited by this idea. Never before had anyone acted so happy just to see me...

“You’ll be putting your talents to waste if a harem is your endgame.”

That was what Tannin had said to me at the end of our underworld training camp.

Sorry, Tannin, but building a harem is still my ultimate goal! After all, what could beat being surrounded by beautiful ladies all day long?! That said, having kids think of me like a superhero didn’t sound so bad, either!

Maybe I could attract a following among young mothers, too?!

M-married women! Young wives! Wonderful! Supposedly, hero programs on TV are written with mothers in mind these days!

If I became famous, someone might make a live show about me one day! Children would bring their moms with them to see it! And I might even be able to meet some of them!

I had discovered a path to meeting a treasure trove of beauties from the underworld!

Whoaaaaa! There are so many wives I can get my hands on! Sorry, Tannin. I’m definitely going to become a harem king! I’ll even let other people’s wives join my harem!

“Got it, Sirzechs! I’ll do whatever I can for those wives—I mean, those kids! By the way, it sounds like someone’s cheering in the background. What’s going on?”

I had been wondering what that noise was for a while now.

“Ah, right. Today is Kuou Academy’s Sports Festival. I’ve come to see my little sister shine.”

Wh-wh-wh-what?! I quickly glanced at my calendar and clock to double-check! Ah! Today really was the Sports Festival! I had slept in so late that I had almost missed it!

“Grayfia, open a magic circle to bring Issei here to the academy, if you would.”

“Very well.”

After thanking Sirzechs, I hurried off to get changed! I couldn’t afford to miss taking part in the three-legged race with Asia!

Bang! Bang!

The sound of a starting pistol echoed through the air, followed by an announcement for the next event: *“The three-legged race is about to begin. Participants, please line up at the starting position.”*

My event had nearly begun!

The magic circle had sent me to the wooded area near the old school building. I would have to hurry to make it to the sports ground in time!

“And the second-year three-legged race is off!”

It had already begun! Asia and I were part of the second group. Would I make it?!

I bolted as fast as I could, making my way out onto the sports field.

“Issei! This way is faster!”

It was the prez! She had come looking for me!

Oh yeah! That path through the tents does look like a good shortcut!

“Hyoudou! You’re late! Go get Asia!” Saji called out to me as I passed.

“Sorry! Leave it to me!”

There it was—the starting line!

Asia...! Ah! She looked so forlorn, and she was about to tie her leg to that of another guy from my class!

Not on my watch! I’m the only one who gets to run with her!

“Asiaaaaaa!”

She glanced up at my cry, her eyes glistening as she scanned her surroundings!

When she finally spotted me, she joyfully shouted, “Issei!”

I wouldn’t leave her alone! I would always stand by her!

“Sorry, I’ll take it from here,” I said to the other guy when I reached them.

His response was to pat me on the shoulder. “Of course! Take Asia and go!”

Thanks for the encouragement! Just watch us! Asia and I have this in the bag!

I crouched down, tying the rope around my leg and Asia’s.

“Issei! You made it!”

“Naturally. I’m your Issei, right? Whenever you need me, I’ll come running.”

Asia looked like she might start sobbing all over again. We really had to do something about that later!

“Group B!”

Our turn had come. We wrapped our arms around each other’s waists and stood ready to go.

Bang!

The starting gun sounded!

“Let’s go, Asia!”

“Okay!”

From the very first step, we were in sync, picking up considerable speed.

“Issei! Asia! Go for gold!”

“You can do it, you two!”

The prez and Akeno were cheering us on!

“Issei! Asia! You can do it!”

“Gooooo! Isseeeeei! Asiaaaaa!”

“Do your best, you two!”

Kiba, Xenovia, and Irina shouted encouragement our way as well.

“Isseeeeei! Asiaaaaa!” Gasper called out to us in a loud voice.

“You can do it!” Even Koneko was excited!

“I won’t let you off if you drop the ball here!” Azazel said.

Teach! You can count on us!

“You came, Issei! Don’t worry, I’ll get the best part on film!”

“Issei! Asia! We believe in you both!”

Dad! Mom! Watch as your son and daughter snatch victory!

As Asia and I ran together across the field, I said, “Asia, I’ll always be by your side. Don’t ever leave me.”

“—!”

It was obvious she was holding back tears, but she steadied herself and concentrated her energies on running!

And then...

Bang!

Another shot from the starting pistol!

Asia and I had broken through the tape at the finish line!

“Yeeeeesssss!”

As we received the flag for taking first place, the two of us adopted a victory pose!

Ha-ha-ha, see that, everyone?! See how fast Asia and I are together?!

“We did it! We did it, Asia!”

“Yes! We won, Issei!”

We grasped each other’s hands in joy!

See that? Together, we’re unstoppable! Whoa...

My elation suddenly wavered as I realized I was wobbling on my feet, ready to fall over at any second. Weakness washed over me. My strength...was spent. I had only just woken up from a coma. Maybe I’d overdone it a little.

“Issei! Are you all right?” Asia asked as she supported my weight.

“Ah... Perhaps I got a little too excited.”

“Issei. Asia.” The prez approached, pointing at the gymnasium with a smile. “Asia, there’s no one looking behind the gym, so go use your Sacred Gear to heal Issei, if you would.”

“R-right!”

Sorry, Prez. Ugh. I felt pathetic. I was supposed to have built up considerable endurance, and here I was about to face-plant...

Asia lent me her shoulder as we walked past the prez, when...

“Go for it, Asia.”

“—.”

Huh? Asia’s face flushed bright red for some reason...

Once we were out of sight behind the gymnasium, Asia set about healing me. Ahhh, nothing beat that warm green glow that seeped through the body. Once I felt a little stronger, I rose to my feet and flexed my arms a little.

“All right. I should be fine for the rest of the day now!”

“Issei...,” Asia began.

I turned around. “Huh? What is it?”

Asia was standing on her tiptoes. She leaned forward slightly, and her lips pressed against mine.

All of a sudden, we were kissing. I didn’t know what to do!

U-uh-oh.

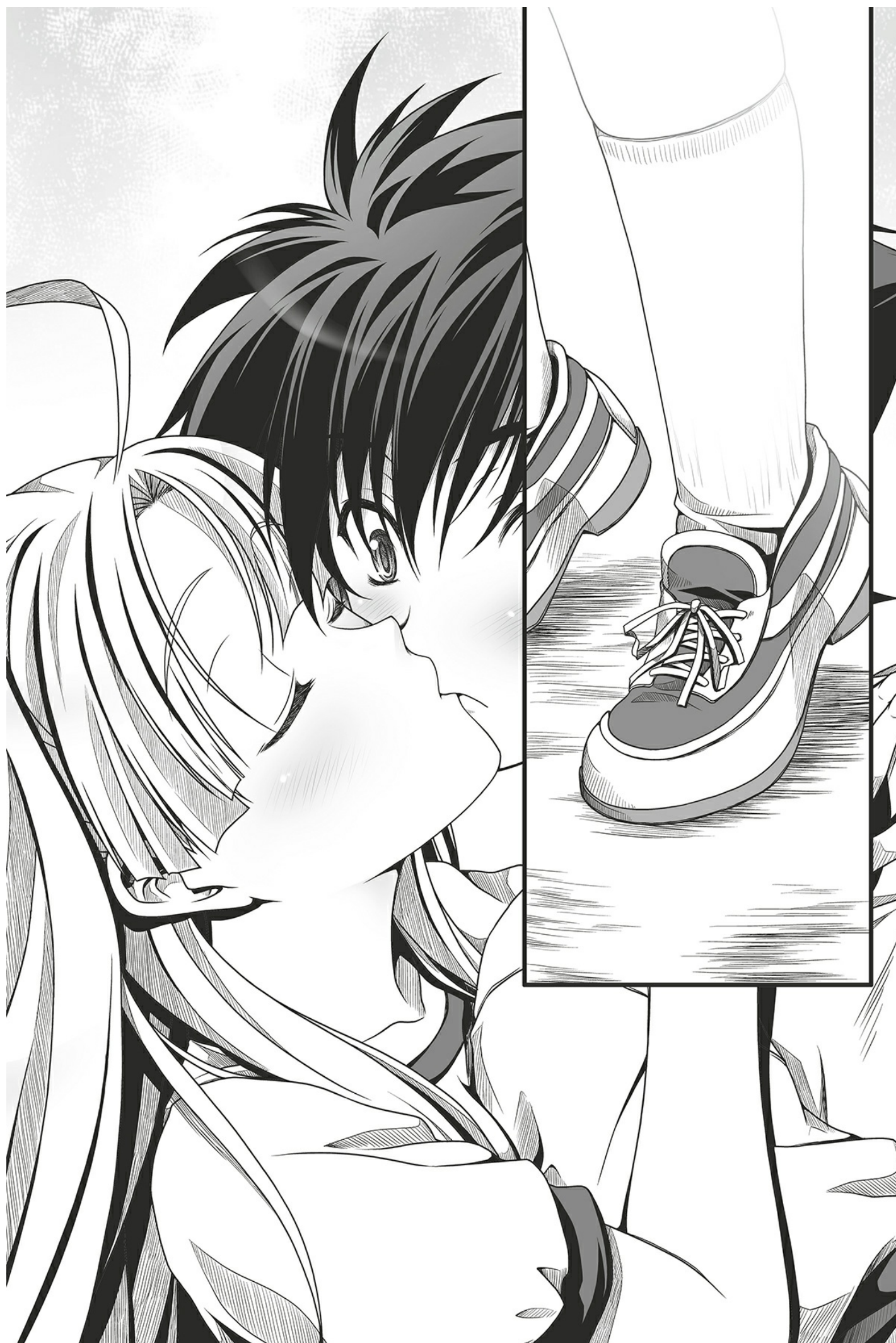
I felt like my head was about to explode...! I mean, sh-sh-she was kissing me! Asiaaaaa!

She flashed me a warm smile, tilting her head to one side. “I love you, Issei. I’ll always stand by your side.”

I was so overcome with emotion that I collapsed to the ground then and there.

I...

I was so happyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!



AFTERWORD

With the help of the on-off switch that is Rias Gremory's magnificent breasts, Issei Hyoudou transforms into the legendary Breast Dragon Emperor!

Hi, Ishibumi here. I did something stupid again. This disease of mine is progressing rapidly, huh?

What did you think of "The Song of the Breast Dragon"? When I was writing it, I kept imagining that Fujimi Shobo might want to release it as a single one day.

Now then, with the end of this sixth volume, the arc that started in Volume 3 has come to a close. This volume serves as a climax of sorts—the action took off right from the get-go, and it ended with the same momentum. You can also think of this one as a continuation of Volume 5. Issei's raging lust has now led him to fondling the breasts of many of the female club members.

This time around, our protagonists wound up caught in the conflict between the three main factions and the Khaos Brigade. At the same time, Issei and his fellow club members fought desperately to save a precious friend. I wanted to conclude things with a flashy confrontation, so unlike their last battle, I let them go all out this time around.

If the first two volumes were like the initial part of the story, then the third through sixth ones are the second. Volume 7 will kick off part three. In other words, a fresh new arc!

I've left a few things unresolved, so you might be wondering whether we can expect to tie them up during the next arc... You'll just have to wait and see!

I'm also hoping to have a battle against Sairaorg, the strongest demon youth.

There were a lot of twists and turns along the way, but Asia has finally found happiness, sharing a kiss with her beloved Issei! Will the two of them live happily ever after?

What's more, Irina made her return! She's as peppy as ever, but now she's been made an angel and is enrolled at Kuou Academy with the others. Think of her as completing the adorable Church Maiden Trio with Asia and Xenovia.

As a Protestant, Irina practically ignores all the denominational differences within the Church, but try to think of that as an original aspect of the DxD universe. Here, Heaven represents all sects of Christianity.

Also, while the angels have adopted a system similar to the Evil Pieces, it won't be a major part of the narrative. Think of it more like worldbuilding. Still, a mysterious Joker may make an appearance at some point.

I've learned that Ravel has developed quite a following among readers, even if she hasn't had a great many appearances thus far. You can expect to see more of her from now on. I'm even thinking about making her a regular member of the cast, depending on her reception.

Then we have Freed. Let's give him a round of applause. He was a good villain.

And Ophis made her entrance, too. She's only just been introduced, but I'm sure we'll see her again.

Issei's Juggernaut Drive was a bit creepy, huh? That Sacred Gear is still full of mysteries.

Now then, on to my thanks.

To Miyama-Zero and my editors, we've done it! Volume 6 is out the door! My deepest gratitude for all your efforts!

To my readers, thank you for your continued support! The series still has a long way to go, so please stick with us! Issei's story isn't over, and neither is anyone else's!

Time for a little promotion! *High School DxD* will be decorating the cover of the July edition of *Dragon Magazine* this May! Thanks to everyone involved in making that happen! With sales rising steadily, we've now made the cover! There will also be some special information inside, along with a short story, so if you see it on the shelf, please buy a copy!

I hope to see you all again this summer in Volume 7!

Heroes

“Shalba Beelzebub has fallen. And the White Dragon Emperor Vali refuses to step up to succeed him.”

“I see, I see. In that case, the Khaos Brigade’s old demon regime is done for. Hmm. Maybe we shouldn’t have instructed our man with Dimension Lost to hold back?”

“You’re one to talk. *You* were the one who ordered him not to get too involved. Is it not for those with the blood of heroes to act, Cao Cao?”

“I wonder... I’ve been enjoying collecting new human material.”

“The first generation felt the same. But whether we like it or not, we’re going to take action eventually. That *thing* inside you won’t permit otherwise. Not the ultimate Longinus—”

“The *True* Longinus... Where does this spear point, I wonder? To destruction? Or perhaps...”

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